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Ambivalence of entertainment: the Cold War and pro-communist Mandarin cinema

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ABSTRACT

Colonial Hong Kong was a transregional hub of Cold War ideological confrontation. The United States and its Chinese ally, Chiang Kai-shek's Taiwan, struggled with Beijing for the hearts of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and around the world. Pro-Communist émigré cinema in the mid-twentieth century was a prime cultural manifestation of this Cold War contest. After an initial period of radicalization and antagonism, the pro-Communist studios in Hong Kong gradually shifted to a moderate approach whose goal was not to undermine British colonial rule or espouse revolutionary ideologies. Rather, the new strategy was one of flexibility and restraint that aimed to maintain a strategic presence in the local film industry and serve as a point of contact for overseas Chinese. Later, with the emergence of two pro-Free China giant studios, Motion Pictures & General Investment Co. Ltd. and Shaw Brothers, the cinematic ecosystem in Hong Kong was significantly altered. In order to hold on to their market presence in an increasingly more competitive environment, pro-Communist film companies embraced a more entertainment-oriented ethos and experimented with various popular genres, while struggling to remain truthful to their ideal of "guiding people to do good." With in-depth analysis of two popular films by Zhu Shilin, *The Dividing Wall* (*Yibang zhi ge*) and *Sweet as Honey* (*Tiantian mimi*), this essay seeks to historicize the ways in which the Beijing-sponsored film establishment in 1950s Hong Kong negotiated and balanced a changing set of political, ideological, and commercial interests in pursuit of its strategic mission.

KEYWORDS

Cinematic ecosystem; cold war; march first incident; Zhu Shilin; Chang-Feng-Xin

The Cold War between the USA and the USSR dominated the international order in the second half of what Eric Hobsbawm calls the "short twentieth century." The two superpowers competed for power and influence. They struggled for political, military, and ideological supremacy. In the past two decades, with newly available archival materials, new generations of researchers have produced a rich array of scholarship that brings forth important East and Southeast Asian perspectives that complicate the bipolarity of Cold War historiography. While these works deal largely with high-table diplomacy or military history or regional power politics, this essay brings attention to the cultural dynamics of Asia's Cold War, focusing specifically on the ambivalent development of "pro-Communist" Mandarin cinema in 1950s Hong Kong.

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Colonial Hong Kong was a transregional hub of Cold War ideological confrontation. The United States and its Chinese ally, Chiang Kai-shek's Taiwan, struggled with Beijing for the hearts of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and around the world. The local colonial government tried to maintain control through claiming "neutrality" in relation to superpower politics and extended Communist-Nationalist conflicts while asserting its power whenever it deemed necessary against challenges from the opposing camps. Pro-Communist émigré cinema in the mid-twentieth century was a prime cultural manifestation of this Cold War contest. After an initial period of radicalization and antagonism, the pro-Communist studios in Hong Kong, despite their occasional rhetoric, gradually shifted to a moderate approach whose goal was not to undermine British colonial rule or espouse explicit revolutionary ideologies. Rather, the new strategy was one of flexibility and restraint that aimed principally to maintain a strategic presence in the local film industry and to serve as a point of contact for overseas Chinese. This strategy change, which entailed maintaining a delicate balance between ideological commitment and avoidance of direct clashes with the British rule, apparently first started after the colonial clampdown on Communist activities in the early 1950s and had become increasingly dominant. Later, with the emergence of two pro-Free China giant studios, Motion Pictures and General Investment Co. Ltd. (MP&GI) and Shaw Brothers, the cinematic ecosystem in Hong Kong was significantly altered. In order to hold on to their market presence in an increasingly competitive environment, pro-Communist film companies embraced a more entertainment-oriented ethos and experimented with a diversity of popular genres, while struggling to remain truthful to their ideal of "guiding people to do good" (*dao ren xiang shan*). With in-depth analysis of two popular films by Zhu Shilin, *The Dividing Wall* (*Yibang zhi ge* 1952) and *Sweet as Honey* (*Tiantian mimi*, 1959), this essay seeks to historicize the ways in which the Beijing-sponsored film establishment in 1950s Hong Kong negotiated and balanced a changing set of political, ideological, and commercial interests in pursuit of its strategic mission.

Radicalization of Mandarin cinema

As a result of the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists after the Second World War, many film producers, directors, scriptwriters, and stars relocated from Shanghai to Hong Kong and began making Mandarin films in a primarily Cantonese-speaking territory. While many of these émigré film workers were politically unaligned and only wanted to work in a place with a relatively stable political climate, there were also some (such as Bai Yang, Cai Chusheng, Ouyang Yuqian, and Wang Weiyi) who were dedicated Communists and fellow-travelers fleeing the Nationalist reign of terror. Despite being in exile, they set out to accomplish the agenda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to mobilize support from the local community and overseas Chinese for the revolutionary cause.

The increasing presence of pro-Communist cinema in Hong Kong did not go unnoticed and was met with hostility from various forces. The colonial government, while trying to maintain a semblance of neutrality so as not to antagonize Beijing, sought to restrain pro-Communist filmmaking through censorship, surveillance, and deportation (Du 2017; Chang 2019, 23–45). To counter the leftist tide, on the other hand, the Nationalist government in Taiwan mounted a series of secret defection campaigns in the early 1950s and offered financial and market incentives to non-Communist film companies in exchange for their support (Lee 2013, 186).

The United States, too, was involved in the anti-Communist crusade in Hong Kong cinema. The State Department's USIS, as veteran officer Richard McCartney revealed later, worked in "supporting filmmakers who were producing anti-Communist pictures in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia"

(O'Brien 1988). Most notable of the US intervention was the covert support for former Associated Press journalist Zhang Guoxin's Asia Pictures, a new film studio, by the Asia Foundation (TAF, originally Committee for Free Asia), which was later revealed to be an American NGO funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (Saunder 2013). The principal goal of TAF was to bolster Hong Kong's non-Communist film community in Asia's Cold War. In this scheme, Asia Pictures was expected to produce films that would compete with and eventually beat out the Communists in the local and regional markets (Chang 1953). Between its founding in 1953 and closure in 1958, Asia Pictures released a total of eight films. The two debuts, Tang Huang's *Tradition (Chuantong*, 1955*)* and Hong Shuwen's *Heroine (Yange*, 1955*)*, were thinly allegorized historical pictures meant to bring home the message of unremitting support of the Nationalist regime in exile. Its other films, however, were mostly apolitical dramas focusing on experiences of displacement (Leary 2012). Scholars and critics have raised questions about the absence of Cold War themes such as celebration of capitalist free market or American individuality in Asia Pictures productions. In reality, it is clear from archival materials that the strategy of Asia Pictures was to try to compete with, and hopefully defeat, pro-Communist films in the region by bringing to the market "bigger, more entertaining" films (Tanner 1953). Yet Asia Pictures produced too few films. TAF was arguably better known for its leading role in the 1950s in organizing the Asia Film Festival with the aim to promote technological modernization and political intra-bloc unity of all free Asian film industries (Klein 2020, 13–30).

Despite all the surveillance, competition, and isolation, the Communists were in a strong strategic position to win the cinematic Cold War in the 1950s. With the Communist victory and takeover of China in 1949, which vowed to inaugurate a new era of national revival and autonomy, the émigré film community was swept by what an insider called a "patriotic fervor" (Shen 2002). This rising tide of nationalism was closely conjoined with personal considerations. As Mandarin cinema had limited financing and market outlets outside of the mainland, emigré filmmakers longed to return home. It was important for them to show allegiance to the new rulers. Starting in 1948, some film artists, most notably stars Li Lihua, Tao Jin, and Liu Qiong, joined the so-called "study groups" (*dushu hui*) organized by local Communists to become familiar with "arts for the people" and keep abreast with the mainland's cultural and political developments. In 1950, they formed a delegation to visit and entertain the troops in the recently "liberated" southern city of Guangzhou, meeting with senior party leaders and cultural officials and helping mobilize public support for the new order (Wang 2006, 111–117; Su 2014, 28–32).

Emigré filmmakers returned home in droves shortly after the Communist takeover of China in 1949, while others were rejected for work in China or were advised to stay behind to help galvanize overseas Chinese support for the Revolution. To this end, one of the key goals of the Communists was to seize control of Yung Hwa. At the time, there were fierce contests between Beijing and Taipei—with, to different extents, US and British intervention—for allegiance and control of Hong Kong's key Nationalist enterprises, such as Bank of China and China Civic Aviation Corporation. Although never owned by the Nationalist government, Yung Hwa was a pro-Taiwan studio that became a prime target for the Communists not only because of its top-of-the-line production facilities but also due to its management problems. The financial troubles of the studio had been deteriorating since the Communists swept to power; unable to pay salaries, it survived largely on loans from its Southeast Asian distributor, the Cathay Organization. Confusion and agitation ensued. Adhering to the CCP Film Group's strategy of infiltrating and taking control of the production departments of major film studios in the 1930s (Pang 2002), pro-Communist

film workers joined Yung Hwa and incorporated strong political messages into some of its films. Allegedly refusing to allow his studio to "fall to Communism," Li Zuyong, the owner of Yung Hwa, was rumored to burn one of those politically-charged films, Li Pingqian's *A Rich Man in Distress* (*Gongzi luonan*, 1950), and required all future projects to be under close supervision. This rumor helped fuel a strike in late 1951 that brought the company to a halt, and leading the strike was Sima Wensen, Communist head of the Film Study Association (Kwok and Wong 2001, 10–12, 36–46)

The colonial government quickly and harshly intervened in the strike, deporting ten accused ringleaders—including Sima Wensen and scriptwriter Shen Shi as well as actors Liu Qiong and Shu Shi, all key figures in the pro-Communist film community—in January 1952. One reason why the colonial authority came down hard on the strike is that, as Governor Grantham told his Singapore counterpart, the Communists had established a robust position in the film world thanks to the creation of a strong media apparatus during the Chinese Civil War in the late 1940s (Yip and King 2007). At the same time, it is important to note that the Yung Hwa strike took place at a time that saw a rising tide of labor activism in Hong Kong. In the early 1950s, pro-Beijing trade unions took the Communist triumph as a call for anti-imperialist, anti-colonial struggles. A string of strikes and mass protests ensured, including those by militant tramway employees, seamen, and dockyard workers. The British government had feared that Beijing would seize Hong Kong by inciting mass political violence (if not militarily) and was therefore adamant in clamping down all disturbances in an effort to prevent possible Communist takeover (Carroll 2007, 138–148; Mark 2004). Indeed, shortly after the Yung Hwa strike, an even bigger clash broke out between the colonial authority and pro-Communist activists: following a huge fire in Tung Tau Village that claimed many lives in December 1951, several textile workers were arrested and deported for organizing protests against lack of government aids. Then, a massive clash occurred on March 1st, 1952, when tens of thousands of pro-Communist activists were allegedly angered by rumors of the colonial police's refusal to allow the Guangdong provincial government delegation to bring relief to the fire victims. They clashed with the police along Nathan Road in Kowloon, leading to many injuries and more than a hundred arrests. The Communist organ, *Ta Kung Pao*, moreover, was suspended publication for spreading "inflammatory materials." Only after Beijing interceded, protesting the colonial government's heavy-handed oppression of Chinese people and threatening to "reconsider China's policy about Hong Kong," was the suspension reversed. This diplomatic crisis gave rise to a new wave of deportation by the colonial authority. According to veteran *Wen Wei Po* newsman Zhou Yi (2009, 53–59, 81–95), the Communist leadership in Beijing criticized the "March First Incident" as an act of "ultra-leftist" radicalism. As a result, trade unions, along with other pro-Beijing organizations, increasingly stayed away from an aggressively oppositional stance and kept a low profile. Similarly, the Yung Hwa strike and the Tung Tau Village events, as will be clear later, also marked the beginning of a shift to moderation and tactical flexibility in Hong Kong's pro-Communist cinema.

Yung Hwa came out of the strike as a loser and found itself on the cusp of bankruptcy. While Li Zuyong won praises from pro-Free World press as a Nationalist loyalist and "anti-Communist hero" and, after much pleading, received a loan from Taiwan to resume production, the colonial government, in an alleged attempt to prevent politicization of the local film industry, retrieved the studio's crown land in the name of urban renewal. Burdened with added relocation costs, the struggling Yung Hwa shuttered in 1956. Its major creditor, the Cathay Organization, took over the defunct studio's production facilities and used them to set up its production arm, MP&GI (more later), in Hong Kong.

Telling China's stories to the world: "Patriotic" cinema

Despite the deportation of key film workers, the pro-Communist film community was able to make headways in building an interlocking network of production and distribution facilities in a few years following the failed coup. They included, most prominently, the Mandarin film studios Great Wall (Chang Cheng) Movie Enterprise and Phoenix (Feng Huang) Film Corporation; Sun Luen (Xinlian or United Film Corporation) and its sister group, Zhonglian (Union Film Enterprise), both of which focused on making Cantonese-language films; and Southern (Nanfang) Film Corporation, a secretly PRC-owned distribution company that brought China-made films to the world and distributed pictures from Hong Kong (and elsewhere) to the mainland (Hui 2018; Xu 2017, 245–247; Yip 2017, 36–38). Camouflaging as private enterprises with overseas Chinese investment to neutralize their political background and stance, the pro-Communist studios—known today as "Chang-Feng-Xin" in short—were, characteristically, what historian Kenneth Osgood (2006, 1–15) calls the "state-private network" and aimed to take advantage of the "window" afforded by the colony to bring the story of the Chinese Revolution to overseas Chinese audiences in the region and globally.

Some untapped sources regarding Great Wall bring to light the formation and workings of the so-called "Chang-Feng-Xin" group. The pre-history of Great Wall was fraught with controversy; it suffices for us to start with the takeover of the studio in 1950 by Yuan Yan'an, a Shanghai attorney and relative of Fei Yimin, publisher of the Hong Kong Communist organ, *Ta Kung Pao*. As the studio was deep in red, Yuan brought in Fei Yimin and Lu Jiankang, a so-called "red capitalist" with strong Beijing connections, and made a strategy shift to make films for the mainland market. To cut deficit, he let go a few superstars (such as Li Lihua) and recruited new talents among young émigrés. Carefully groomed, three of these newcomers—Xia Meng (Moon Hsia), Fu Qi, and Shi Hui—quickly rose to prominence and became the top stars in the pro-Communist film world (and in the Hong Kong film industry at large). Their star appeals, together with superior craft and seriousness of purpose, helped make some Great Wall films—as well as those from other "Patriotic" studios—top box-office grossers in the early 1950s (see below).

Other sources of funding also helped boost the "Patriotic" cinema in Hong Kong. According to an US intelligence document, Great Wall obtained a HK$50,000 loan in 1954 from an unnamed Communist bank for each of the film it made, "against the profit from the mainland screening" (Hsu 1954). An earlier report, however, revealed that the studio received annual pre-production fees, which ranged from HK$200,000 (A-class) to HK$120,000 (C-class) per film, for four pictures that it was set to sell to China (Dawnson 1953). Their differences notwithstanding, both accounts could be accurate insofar as the form and amount of subsidies, given Beijing's periodic political and economic turmoil, could change over time. Yet it is also possible—and very likely indeed—that Great Wall needed both sources of funding to stay afloat, as the average cost of a black-and-white Mandarin film in the 1950s was around HK$200,000. Another detail that is not very clear is whether the subsidies also covered selling to the Southeast Asian countries, which (along with Hong Kong) were the main target markets for the pro-Communist studios. Indeed, boasting the ability of its films to "cover all overseas Chinese communities" in publicity materials, Great Wall made clear its goal to reach audiences in every major Southeast Asian country—from Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, and the Philippines to Singapore, Indonesia, and Borneo—as well as those in India, Japan, and the Pacific.

Although the subsidies were small, they did provide a stable source of revenue. Stability was of utmost importance to Mandarin filmmaking in the 1950s, a period characterized by a terrible

business environment as a result of geopolitical turmoil, economic uncertainty, and volatile market conditions in the region after the onset of the Korean War. Beijing's funding made the pro-Communist film companies less dependent than other private studios on box-office performance. They were thus relatively free from the need to chase market trends—at least in the early to mid-1950s—despite being subjected to the dictates of Beijing's Cold War propaganda effort and periodic political turmoil. At the same time, "Patriotic" studios kept their overhead costs low. Their employees, on average, had the lowest pay in the industry, and they were paid, its publicity claimed, in accordance with egalitarian principles. (However, judging from their fashionable outfits and comfortable homes, their top stars were more equal than the others). What inspired the pro-Communist filmmakers, besides the stable income, were supposedly a mix of idealism and sense of community. Acclaimed directors Li Pingqian and Zhu Shilin, for example, fled to Hong Kong to escape the burden of accused collaboration with the enemies in Japanese-ruled Shanghai and were quickly recruited into the "Patriotic" film world. Out of their alleged commitments to serve the new China, they had stayed there for the rest of their career, despite credible rumors of attractive offers they received from pro-Nationalist film companies such as Shaw Brothers. Equally important was the careful way in which the studio management orchestrated a collective sense of community, one that was lauded as both morally and politically superior to the decadent and egotistic lifestyles of many Hong Kong filmmakers. Instead of partying and hobnobbing with the rich and famous like those working in non-Communist studios, the "Patriotic" film workers organized "wholesome, collective" activities such as picnic, hiking, swimming, basketball games, holiday gatherings, and various trips to China; for the top stars, there were even occasional visits with political elites in China (Ho 2011, 150–188; Law 2006, 105–116).

Most importantly for the rank and file workers, moreover, was the 500-strong South China Film Industry Workers Union, which was formed in 1949 to promote communal solidarity among "Patriotic" filmmakers. At that time, as part of the colonial administration's attempts to track the activities of pro-Communist activists, "Patriotic" film workers were under constant surveillance and scrutiny. As Lo Dun, a filmmaker affiliated with Sun Luen, recalled: "We were considered leftists. In our daily lives, we were followed by special agents [from the Hong Kong Police's Special Branch]" (Kwok 2000, 139). Indeed, the Hong Kong government would dispatch undercover agents to infiltrate the "Patriotic" studios and spy on their activities ("Huang Yi" 2011, 169). In response to this heightened surveillance by the colonial police, but also to the concern for "defection" of employees to the enemy camp, the Ministry of Culture's Film Bureau in China gave instruction in a 1954 document that the Union should hereafter devote "more to providing assistance and promoting mutual support than to organizing overtly political activities" (quoted from Su 2014, 35). This is exactly what happened, with the Union increasingly focusing their effort on providing aids and welfares, such as maternity subsidies, children education allowance, and unemployment benefits, for the poor and destitute among its members ("Extract" 1960). Again, although these financial supports were small, they meant a lot to those in the lower rung of the film industry. And judging from the reports of American and Taiwan agents that frequently blamed the Union as a prime reason for the "defection" of rank and file employees from pro-Nationalist to pro-Communist film companies, this strategy seemed to work effectively.

The "Patriotic" studios, like other local Communist-backed media organizations, reported through the Hong Kong and Macao Work Committee to the State Council's Foreign Affairs Staff Office in Beijing headed by Premier Zhou Enlai and General Chen Yi. Overseeing the affairs in Hong Kong was Liao Chengzhi, Zhou's trusted aide in charge of the united front work for overseas Chinese (Xu 2017, 242–245). According to a number of sources, Liao tried to pursue,

through all the ideological twists and turns in China up till the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, a policy in line with the CCP's flexible and pragmatic approach to the "Patriotic" cinema in Hong Kong. This approach emphasized using the British colony as an encountering point and telling the stories of New China to the 12 million overseas Chinese around the globe, especially in Southeast Asia, in order to neutralize the influence of the US and Taiwan, which commanded a well-placed apparatus of overseas Chinese organizations, including schools and business associations (Oyen 2012). As Liao explained to a group of "Patriotic" studio officials in 1964, Hong Kong had a different role from the mainland in the revolutionary process of China; its primary function was to promote patriotic sentiment, build bridges to overseas Chinese communities, and avoid provoking political censorship in the region. For this reason, he declared that "Hong Kong cinema should be understood as a revolutionary cinema of the capitalist system" and "a branch of the socialist-proletariat cinema in the motherland." It should, accordingly, deemphasize ultra-radicalism and over-politicization. In other words, the mission of Hong Kong's "Patriotic" cinema was neither to export revolution nor to incite anti-colonial struggles, but rather to maintain a strategic presence in the cultural battlefield of Cold War Hong Kong in order to build a united front with "friendly" Chinese people around the globe (Liao 1990, 215–219, 275–279, 323–325, 395–399, 451–458).

Liao Chengzhi presented the above ideas in the mid-1960s, but this strategic goal of avoiding colonial suppression and strengthening the position of "Patriotic" cinema in the Hong Kong film industry had its origin in a much earlier time. For instance, after the failed Yung Hwa coup and the Tung Tau Village incident that led to violent confrontations with the colonial government in late 1951 and early 1952, the Film Bureau of the Ministry of Culture brought forth three documents in 1954 evaluating the situations facing the "Patriotic" cinema. Overall, these documents —"Reference Materials for Hong Kong Film Personnel" (Xianggang dianying jie renwu cankao ziliao), "Reference Materials for Hong Kong Cinema and Film Circle" (Xianggang dianying yu dianyingjie qingkuang cankao ziliao), and "Reference Materials for Hong Kong Film Production Companies" (Xianggang dianying zhipian gongsi qingkuang cankao ziliao)—criticized pro-Communist film workers in Hong Kong for over-politicization and ultra-radicalism that provoked mounting colonial intervention and alienated film artists. They urged "Patriotic" film organizations to keep a low profile, tone down their rhetoric, refrain from forcing ideology on others, and above all, avoid head-on clashes with the colonial government (quoted from Su 2014, 26–58). All these would become the guidelines for the pro-Communist studios in Hong Kong, and the dominant trend of "Chang-Feng-Xin" productions from the mid-1950s up through the beginning years of the Cultural Revolution can best be described, in the words of long-time Sun Luen general manager Liao Yiyuan, as films that aimed to be both edifying and entertaining, with the ultimate goal of "guiding the audiences to do good" (quoted from Ho 2011, 152; Yip 2017, 36–39). This shift of emphasis raised alarms among American cultural warfare officers, who called these more entertainment-oriented films from the left "pinkies" and warned of their potential ability to bolster the strategic position of "Patriotic" cinema in the war for hearts and minds (Survey 1956).

The Dividing Wall

The change of production strategy in Hong Kong's "Patriotic" cinema became increasingly obvious after 1952 and 1953. *The Dividing Wall*, a social drama directed by Zhu Shilin in 1952, marked an ambivalent transition from the early phase of radical anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism to a narrative focusing on "guiding the audiences to do good" in a supposedly entertaining way.

A prominent theme emerging from the films of "patriotic fervor" following the heels of the Communist takeover of China was the call for returning to the homeland: to abandon the evils of Hong Kong for the glory of building a new China. That was originally the message of *The Dividing Wall* as well, which was produced by the Loon-Ma ("Dragon-Horse") Film Company. Founded in 1950 by Fei Mu, the eminent director of *Spring in A Small Town* (1948), and Wu Xingcai, a business tycoon and long-time film investor from Shanghai, the company sought to take advantage of Hong Kong's economic stability to make films of both artistic and social values. Like a number of small pro-Communist studios, notably Da Guangming, Nanguo, and Wushi niandai, that sprang up in Hong Kong after 1948–1949 and brought to the market films with strong ideological tendencies, Loon-Ma had connections with the CCP cultural leadership in Beijing. It boasted a strong roster that included director Zhu Shilin, actress Wei Wei, and the Wushi niandai staff, but had been struggling financially almost immediately after its inception. In 1953, it was reorganized and transitioned into Feng Huang (Kwok and Wong 2001, 72).

Before making *The Dividing Wall*, Zhu Shilin had made two artistically acclaimed films for Long-Ma, namely *Flower Girl* (*Hua guniang*, 1951), a dramatic reevaluation of the meanings of pro-Japanese collaborator, and *The Show Must Go On* (*Jianghu ernü*, 1952), which dramatizes the sufferings of a group of refugee acrobatic artists in the British colony before they decided—happily—to return to China. Long-Ma almost had to close because of financial and personnel problems when *The Dividing Wall* started shooting in 1951, and then the film was close to being aborted in the middle of its production as several of its key crew members—including male lead Liu Qiong as well as scriptwriters Bai Chen and Qi Wenshao—were deported due to the Yung Hwa strike. Despite its low budget feel, with most of the shooting done inside an apartment with poor lighting, the film was carefully crafted, adroitly weaving the tradition of social realism in 1930s Shanghai left-wing cinema into a sympathetic and moralistic portrayal of *petty urbanites* with fluid, well-designed cinematography and mise-an-scène. In a setting that evokes pre-1949 Shanghai as much as postwar Hong Kong, the film tells the story of a primary school teacher (Li Qing) and a junior office clerk (Han Fei) struggling to survive in a crowded city beset with exploitation and social inequality. The two male urbanites live in tiny rented rooms divided by a paper-thin wall. Their frustration at work (they are constantly abused by their supervisors) and weighty family responsibilities (while they live by themselves, they need to support large families residing elsewhere) are only intensified by their meager living conditions. They hate each other. The many petty conflicts they have (e.g. loud music; bathroom time) are humorously captured by elegant panning shots and add entertainment values to the film.

It takes their new neighbor, Ms. Hua (Jiang Hua), to help the two men understand their shared victimhood under the colonial system. Looking like a female Communist Party cadre found in Chinese revolutionary films of the early 1950s, Ms. Hua, whose last name is synonymous with China, is tall and fit, and teaches at a pro-Communist primary school. Obviously influenced by the same "patriotic fervor" that pervaded the pro-Communist film workers at the time, she is shown in a scene posing questions about the large size, the 400 million population, and the immense resources of China to her smart and well-behaved students, who answer them enthusiastically. This scene is in sharp contrast to the immediately preceding one in which the Li Qing character fails to control his rowdy classroom and is harangued by the principal for treating a rich student preferentially. It is this patriotic, dedicated female teacher, then, who tries to save her male neighbors from mutual recriminations and constant fighting. In a memorable sequence, with the camera rolling to a medium shot of the three characters having a picnic together (reminiscent of similar picnic scenes in Republican Shanghai films), Ms. Hua smilingly helps her male neighbors realize their respective

biases and self-centeredness. The attitudes of the two men begin to change; they tear down the "dividing wall" to share the living space together. What *The Dividing Wall* calls for, then, seems to be the humanistic values of cooperation and empathy rather than collective action and fight against oppression championed by earlier pro-Communist films in Hong Kong. Yet the ending of the film, with Ms. Hua going back to China to reunite with her fiancé, harks back to a recurrent trope—"returning to the homeland"—that invokes, explicitly or implicitly, highly charged political meanings at the time. Even more ambivalent is the closing shot in which the two men hold hands with Ms. Hua and set off to the train station with her. The image of them walking toward the camera, again, conjures up a recurrent (visual) trope found in the endings of *The Show Must Go On*, Da Guangming's *Floating Family* (*Suishang renjia*, 1949; dir. Gu Eryi), and Great Wall's *Home, Sweet Home* (*Nanlai yan*, 1950; dir. Yue Feng), where the characters approaching the camera together signal their resolve to move away from the corrupted colony to join the building of a new socialist motherland.

Changing cinema ecosystem

As we see form the above discussion, the strategic goal of building a tactical presence in the local film industry and maintaining a point of contact with the outside world, particularly overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and around the globe, led the pro-Communist film studios in Hong Kong to embrace a strategy of moderation. Overt political and ideological mobilization was eschewed in favor of softer moral lessons and social messages that would avoid antagonizing the colonial government and more effectively appeal to the local and regional audience. Such an approach appeared to work in much of the 1950s: the films from the left did very well at the local box office,[1] and the production pace for Great Wall and Feng Huang increased steadily over the years.

Things, however, started to change toward the end of the decade. For one thing, the Hong Kong Mandarin film industry had become more competitive and entertainment-oriented, and propelling this shift was the move by two Singapore-based companies with massive theater chains in Southeast Asia to establish and boost up production operations in Hong Kong. As pointed out earlier, Cathay acquired the debt-ridden Yung Hwa in 1956 and reorganized it into MP&GI. The new company, under the remote leadership of Singapore-based tycoon Loke Wan Tho, quickly launched an ambitious attempt to modernize Mandarin-language cinema. To accomplish this goal, MP&GI modeled its production and management practices after the classical Hollywood studio system (vertical integration, contracted directors and stars, the practice of script supervision, etc.). It also focused on making films—primarily urban comedies, melodramas, and musicals—that celebrated American-style modernity and middle-class values, showcased exuberant scenes of singing and dancing, and utilized a Hollywood-influenced visual style characterized by elegant cinematography, high-key lighting, and stylish production design. At about the same time, Run Run Shaw came over to Hong Kong to assume control of the rather stagnant Shaw and Sons (which had been in operation under his second brother, Shaw Runde, since 1950) and renamed it to Shaw Brothers. Even more than MP&GI, which would be its main competitor in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, Shaw Brothers built itself as a modern industrial organization with a vast studio facility (i.e. the Movietown) and hundreds of employees under long-term contract. This enabled the company to adopt an assembly-line model of production for maximum efficiency and profit (Kong 2008). In contrast to MP&GI, the Shaws initially concentrated not on films with contemporary urban settings and themes, but rather on opulent costume pictures, including a string of box

office-smashing *huangmiao diao* opera films, that evoked a strong sense of nostalgia and cultural nationalism.

With the establishment and rapid expansion of MP&GI and Shaw Brothers, the ecology of Hong Kong Mandarin cinema was fundamentally changed. As briefly mentioned earlier, Hong Kong Mandarin cinema had found itself in a difficult business environment beset by limited capital flows and shrinking market outlets since the Communist takeover of China in 1949. Most film studios were small and poorly equipped. All of this, not surprisingly, led to inconsistent production schedules and qualities. Against this context of an industry-in-crisis, the significance of the intervention of MP&GI and Shaw Brothers is thrown into a sharp relief; what these two studios brought to the local cinema was a rationalized, Hollywood-style system of management and mass production as well as a heightened entertainment-oriented ethos emphasizing star power, genre appeal, and modern film technologies. At the same time, the fact that both studios, due to lack of access to the mainland Chinese market, aligned themselves with Taiwan (the largest Mandarin-speaking community outside of China) put them into the other side of the ideological spectrum from the "Patriotic" studios and exerted more pressure on the latter to maintain its market presence in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. With growing competition from two big, ambitious film companies siding with "Free China" and the local film industry becoming increasingly entertainment-driven, the "Patriotic" studios and filmmakers had no choice but to respond to these challenges and reposition themselves vis-à-vis changing market demands. Thus we see, from the late 1950s onward, a concerted effort on their part to make films in the best-selling genres of the time, especially romantic comedy, costume opera dramas, and, after the mid-1960s, martial arts movies. As Vivian P. Y. Lee (2020, 41–42) recently argues,

> The Cold War [in British Hong Kong] was as much a war of the market as it was a war of ideas … . To stay in the business, film studios regardless of political orientations had to abide by the law of the market.

The importance of keeping abreast of and adapting to market trends was actually nothing new. It had been raised by the studio management from the beginning and reiterated time and again in the subsequent years. Yuan Yang'an (1950), the general manager of the restructured Great Wall until his departure in 1957, first brought up this point in an essay appearing in the inaugural issue of *The Great Wall Pictorial*, the official publication of the studio:

> I do not reject the concerns of producers about "market value" (the so-called "business eye"). I think that a narcissistic attitude, one that only aims to create audiences and refuses to adjust to them, is too high-sounding. Making concessions to audiences under certain conditions is not just not bad, but necessary.

An interview with director Su Chengshou published in 1956, again, emphasized the idea of cinema as an "entertainment enterprise" (*yule shiye*) and thus the need to draw more audiences by accommodating their psychological needs (Tang 1956, 25). And a decade later, George Shen (1959, 4), Yuan Yang'an's son-in-law who had helped run *The Great Wall Pictorial* since 1957 and would join Feng Huang as director in 1962, raised a very similar idea:

> What kind of films should we produce? This question is often raised among film producers. There is no denying that a film, however good, is still a failure without an audience, because film as a form of art is the medium through which we hope to exercise some good influence upon the public, and you can hardly achieve this goal when not many people have seen it. This of course does not mean that we should lower our standards unconditionally to suit the tastes of the public. Rather, we should get

> our audience by producing better and better films, which are entertaining yet provided with a clear conscience on the part of producers.

It is clear, then, that the "Patriotic" studios of Hong Kong, in an attempt to claim a place in the commercial mainstream, had always given ample attention to matters related to market trends and audience preferences. However, it should be stressed here that what makes a film, or a particular kind of film, popular varies across time, and this explains in many ways the changing production trends of pro-Communist film companies over the years. For instance, in the recovery period of early to mid-1950s, social realist films that offered sympathetic portrayals of ordinary people living in hardship and addressed issues of social injustice and redress found a receptive audience among the underprivileged and the working class who made up a sizable portion of the audience at the time. Also popular, especially with more "intellectual" viewers, were films that conjured up the spirit of the May Fourth Movement in opposing the oppressive feudal culture and promoting new cultural values (such as female liberation). Not surprisingly, these two types of film constituted a staple of "Patriotic" cinema in the period: Zhu Shilin's *Should They Marry?* (1951), *Festival Moon* (*Zhongqiu yue*, 1953), and *Between Fire and Water* (*Shuihuo zhi jian*, 1955) were classic examples of the first group, while the second group was best represented by Yue Feng's *The Stormy Night* (*Kuang-feng zhi ye*, 1952) and Li Pingqian's *It So Happens to a Woman* (*Wo shi yige* nüren, 1955).

However, with the film industry becoming more youth- and entertainment-oriented in the late 1950s and beyond, film companies needed to reconsider and recalibrate what kinds of film to make so that they would remain competitive in the market. The "Patriotic" studios were no exception in this regard; they sought to diversify their films in terms of content and style, trying hard to engage with best-selling genres in order to stay close to the interests of local and regional audiences. A good case in point, as exemplified by films such as Hu Xiaofeng's *Those Bewitching Eyes* (*Yan'er mei*, 1958) and Zhu Shilin's *The Way of a Husband and a Wife* (*Fuqi jing*, 1958), was the growing emphasis given to urban romantic comedies—and to the screwball subgenre in particular—which paralleled the main production focus of MP&GI at the time. Likewise, after a string of costume opera films from China—including *The Romance of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, a lavishly made, romantically themed Shaoxing opera film, as well as Shi Hui's *huangmei diao* opera film *Married to a Heavenly Immortal* (*Tianxian pei*, 1955) and Tao Xu's Cantonese opera film *Searching a School* (*Shou shuyuan*, 1956)—became box-office sensations in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, local film companies were eager to cash in on this trend. It was Shaw Brothers, with its box-office shattering *huangmei diao* opera films such as Li Han-hsiang's *Diau Charn* (1958) and *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (*Jiangshan meiren*, 1959), that beat to the punch, but Great Wall was not far behind, putting into production a number of Shaoxing opera films, including Hu Xiaofeng's *Bride Hunter* (*Wang laohu qiang qin*, 1961) and Li Pingqian's *The Princess Falls in Love* (*San kan yumei Liu Jinding*, 1962), at around the same time.

But despite its need to embrace a more entertainment-oriented approach and capitalize on the latest market trends, the "Patriotic" cinema sought to continue its declared mission of making spiritually and morally uplifting films. This entailed a delicate balancing act: the need of the studio management and creative team to negotiate and reconcile a set of competing aesthetic, ideological, and commercial objectives, producing works that would meet the twin objectives of moral/ideological education and diverting entertainment. It goes without saying that such a balance was not always easy to achieve, and the incongruence and tension became especially evident from the late 1950s and early 1960s onward. In this regard, it is interesting to note that *The Great Wall Pictorial* would sometimes publish reviews that were critical of the studio's own films. *Those Bewitching*

Eyes, for instance, was disparaged for its depiction of the female protagonist, whose capricious (*renxing*) attitude was dismissed as mere imitation of foreign films and not something that should be shown in a progressive Chinese film. Besides, the humor in the film was also deemed too Westernized (Xu 1958). More seriously, the growing emphasis on entertainment values was also under attack by the film establishment in Beijing, which raised doubts about the heavy financial strains in supporting such ideologically dubious films. Between 1954 and 1961, Beijing imported 80 films from the "Patriotic" studios from Hong Kong; only 35 of them were publicly shown in big cities, and a mere eight in smaller cities. This put Chen Huangmei, PRC Ministry of Culture Film Bureau Chief, on the defense. While acknowledging the limitations of the films' ideological values, he tried to justify funding of "Patriotic" filmmaking in terms of strategic necessity: "We cannot fulfill the kind of mission they [the pro-Communist studios in Hong Kong] are fulfilling now," Chen explained to the skeptical cadres. "If they stop production, overseas Chinese could only watch American imperialist movies … . It was tough for them to [make films] in a place under imperialist control" (Chen 1962).

Sweet as Honey

Sweet as Honey (*Tiantian mimi*) is an interesting illustration of the tension between educational aspirations and entertainment values that had increasingly confronted the pro-Communist studios of Hong Kong since the late 1950s. First released in early 1959, *Sweet as Honey* was a Feng Huang production co-directed by Ren Yizhi and Chen Jingbo, with Zhu Shilin being listed as the "chief director" (*zong daoyan*). This practice of crediting Zhu as "chief director" in films that were, in reality, mostly executed by co-directing newcomers started in the mid-1950s and continued into the early 1960s. The reasons for doing this were two-fold: on the one hand, it was used as a way to nurture talents and give the novices opportunities to hone their skills under Zhu's guidance (Wong 2001, xxii). On the other hand, Zhu was a well-respected veteran filmmaker who had proven himself a box-office draw in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, and the inclusion of his name thus helped sell a film.

Sweet as Honey tells the story of a newly-wed couple, Chang Mingyang and Ding Huilan, played by Fu Qi and Xia Meng, respectively. Despite being deeply in love with Huilan, Mingyang has a tendency to lie to her—that he does not smoke or has never had a lover before, for instance—in order to keep her happy. One day, Mingyang's cousin and childhood sweetheart, Wang Baozhu, comes to Hong Kong from Singapore and asks for his help in looking for her missing husband. Afraid to have his lie exposed but also not willing to follow in the footsteps of his father-in-law, who is constantly nagged by a jealous wife about his past relationship with a woman, Mingyang lies again that Baozhu is the lover of a co-worker. This, however, only makes matter worse and leads to more deceits and deceptions. All this builds up to a farcical dinner scene in which Mingyang and his father-in-law try to feign innocence before their wives by engaging in a series of hilarious but ultimately futile tricks and fabrications. Eventually, Huilan finds out the truth and helps Baozhu reunite with her husband and exposes Mingyang's lies, but not before another messy brawl full of buffoonery and horseplay.

In dealing with what can be called the "couple's way" (*fuqi zhi dao*), especially the importance of being honest to one another in a married relationship, *Sweet as Honey* can be said to retain the goal of "guiding people to do good" that had become the defining trait of Hong Kong's "Patriotic" cinema since the early to mid-1950s. And the fact that Baozhu, one of the key supporting characters in the film, comes from Singapore also points to the strategic importance of Southeast Asia for the

pro-Communist film establishment, whose primary mission was to help establish a united front with overseas Chinese in the region. But we can also see some new tendencies in the film, notably the softening of the didactic tone and the prevalence of a lighthearted and playful spirit. As an urban comedy centered on coincidences and plot twists, witty dialogues, and farcical situations revolving around conjugal conflicts and love battles between middle-class characters, *Sweet as Honey* exemplifies the screwball comedy, which flourished in Hollywood during the studio era of the 1930s and 1940s. The genre also gained in popularity in Hong Kong (Mandarin) cinema around the late 1950s, after MP&GI's *The Battle of Love* (Qingchang ru zhanchang 1957), a huge box-office hit directed by Yue Feng and scripted by Zhang Ailing,[2] ignited a proliferation of romantic and screwball comedy films (including *Sweet as Honey*) that sought to replicate and build on its success.

Similar to *The Battle of Love* and the American screwball comedy that inspired it, *Sweet as Honey* depicts a world of urban, middle-class life and well-to-do protagonists that contrasts sharply with the working-class milieu in many "Patriotic" films from the first half of the 1950s. Not that middle- or even upper-class societies and characters had not been portrayed before—*Festival Moon* and Hu Xiaofeng and Su Chengshou's *Sunrise* (*Richu*, 1956) are but a few examples—but they were usually treated as caricatures of capitalist vices that served as a criticism of bourgeois decadence and class inequity. Yet, in *Sweet as Honey*, the representations of middle-class affluence are very much taken for granted and function as a neutral backdrop against which the rather silly but ultimately harmless games of lies are played out. In the film's opening scene, for instance, we see Mingyang and Huilan returning to their spacious and well-furnished house after their honeymoon trip—which, it is worth mentioning, was very much an upper- and middle-class (and westernized) practice at the time. At one point, Huilan is seated in front of a large vanity mirror in the bedroom. The camera slowly dollies in until the image is entirely filled by the mirror, and it is via this "mirror perspective" that the rest of the sequence is presented to the viewer: Mingyang can be seen approaching Huilan from the background and sitting beside her. They exchange some sweet lover's words, and it is at this moment that Mingyang lies to Huilan about her being his one and only love in life. The fact that this lie, which is what triggers the subsequent farcical events in the film, and all the sweet talks surrounding it are visually "framed" as a mirror image (i.e. something illusory and not real) brings out the ideas of false appearance and deception. Yet these ideas are not explored through the lens of class in any meaningful ways and thus fail to work as a satire on, say, the hypocrisy and pretense of the middle class. Rather, they are conceived primarily as "universal" moral issues pertaining to the "couple's way," or else exploited as narrative ploys that add to the entertainment values of the film.

Ironically, while *The Battle of Love* goes much beyond *Sweet as Honey* in its depiction of bourgeois luxury (a spacious country villa with a tennis court and a swimming pool; classy convertibles and stylish outfits), it does so in a way that both celebrates and challenges the affluent class and their lavish lifestyles. A good case in point involves the plotline about a middle-class worker ridiculously trying to impersonate the rich and woo the wealthy heroine, which appears to suggest the illusory and out-of-reach nature—for the majority of the local and regional audiences at least—of upper-class extravagance highlighted by the film. *Sweet as Honey*, however, has little of this self-reflexivity that would allow it to cast a more critical eye on the class issue. Situated within a solidly middle-class milieu but lacking in any meaningful reflections on class differences and relationships, the film's exploration of conjugal ethics does little to interrogate or challenge the status quo of the middle class. In fact, as a (relatively) well-made, easygoing comedy with likeable characters and farcical but harmless complications arising from white lies and partial truths, the film can be said to

affirm the petit-bourgeoisie's penchant for stability, moderation, and "respectable" middle-brow entertainment.

Furthermore, compared to *The Battle of Love* (and the Hollywood screwball comedy that inspired it), *Sweet as Honey* also shows marked differences in terms of its gender representations. It is frequently noted that screwball comedies have a propensity for portraying emancipated and strong-willed women on an equal footing with men. A characteristic feature of the genre, Stanley Cavell (1981, 16) maintains, resides in "the creation of a new woman, or the new creation of a woman," which is bound up with a new phase in the history of female consciousness in the United States. Adhering closely to this female-centric perspective, *The Battle of Love* puts at the center of its narrative and visual attention a spirited and mischievous heroine, played by superstar Lin Dai, who spends the majority of the screen time flirting with her suitors in order to make her beloved cousin jealous. Even though the latter seemingly rejects her affection to the very end, the last shot of the film—with Lin Dai's "playgirl" character laughing and embracing her cousin's neck from the back as he is nervously driving his car—suggests that it is she who has the upper hand in this battle of love. In her sly manipulation of men, the female protagonist in *The Battle of Love* embodies what Ng (2008, 169) calls "a feminist vision," exhibiting "a provocative charisma and transgressive impulses … to contest a male-centered worldview."

In sharp contrast to this assertive heroine and her freewheeling spirit, Huilan in *Sweet as Honey* is a much more passive and conventional character; a cute beauty who is credulous (she is unsuspecting of the many lies told to her by Mingyang), inexperienced (she has no clue how to get the truth out of Mingyang and has to rely on her mother's ruse), and likes to be pampered (Mingyang has to hug her to sleep after he lies to her about seeing a rat in the bedroom). Her passivity and lack of agency are also reinforced by the film's narrative, which is driven largely not by what she does, but by the white lies of her husband. A comparison between *Sweet as Honey* and another urban romantic comedy scripted by Zhang Ailing, Sang Hu's *Love Live the Wife* (*Taitai wansui*, 1947), makes this point clear. Telling lies with good intentions is also a key narrative impetus in this older film from postwar Shanghai. Specifically, the film focuses on Chen Sizhen, an ordinary Shanghai housewife played by Jiang Tianliu, who is required to maintain the order and well-being of the family by repeatedly lying to others and maneuvering through her husband's infidelity and its unpleasant repercussions (bankruptcy, extortion, etc.). Her manipulative power, I hasten to add, does not necessarily entail female liberation or resistance, for under the veneer of a woman possessing the agency of artful deception and ploy, there is also a subtle sense of loss and compromise in the sacrifice of a dedicated housewife who fails to break out of the oppressiveness and victimization of conventional domesticity (Fu 2000, 102). But in putting the narrative focus squarely on the female protagonist, the film does underscore her private interest and desire as well as her struggle against patriarchy and the family system.

What we see in *Sweet as Honey*, however, is a reversal of this female-centric (and quasi-feminist) perspective. The narrative is now centered on Mingyang, the film's male protagonist, whose deceits and lies are what, unwittingly, drive the story and set into motion a string of farcical situations. And unlike the maneuvers of Sizhen in *Love Live the Wife*, his acts of deception are no symptomatic manifestation of patriarchal familial ideology and its oppressive burden on women, but rather a man's petty effort to avoid the unpleasant nagging from a jealous wife. In all this, Huilan is by and large stripped of her agency and relegated to a secondary role in the film. True, she does find out the identity of Baozhu and makes a fool of Mingyang (and everybody else) by keeping this information secret in the last fifteen minutes or so of the film, but this moment of power is too little, too late and does not fundamentally change her characterization as an innocent but

also somewhat bland and shallow wife. As such, Huilan deviates from the typically strong-willed and assertive heroines in screwball films. In fact, she is also markedly different from the main female lead, also played Xia Meng, in *Those Bewitching Eyes*, an earlier screwball comedy from Great Wall. In that film, the heroine is blocked from her relationship with a hardworking man by her snobbish parents and forced to marry a rich but vulgar guy. Frustrated, she comes up with different madcap schemes—faking suicide, running away from home, and even pretending a prospective marriage with her godfather—to sabotage her parents' plan. In her mischievous and rebellious spirit as well as her quest for independence, she is more akin to the Lin Dai character in *The Battle of Love* than to Huilan in *Sweet as Honey*, but as noted earlier, it is also these qualities that led to the heroine being criticized as "capricious," too "Westernized," and not apposite to a "progressive" film. Symptomatic of the underlying tension in Hong Kong's "patriotic" cinema at the time, the turn to the screwball comedy was motivated largely by commercial considerations, but this "imported" genre required, to reiterate Cavell's words, "the creation of a new woman"—a new American woman, to be exact; an incarnation of *Western* modernity deemed incompatible with official Communist ideology. Thus the "taming" of the female protagonist in *Sweet as Honey*, whose portrayal, ironically, was in many ways a regression not only from the heroine in *Those Bewitching Eyes* but also from those female characters who struggle with oppressive traditions and aspire to independence and freedom in many previous "Patriotic" films.

Epilogue

In this essay, we explore how Beijing-backed "Patriotic" film companies strove to build a strategic market presence in Hong Kong, and through it, to extend its influence to the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and the globe. In order to avoid provoking suppression by the colonial government, they gradually moved away from an explicitly politicized agenda to adopt a more moderate and flexible approach. As demonstrated in *The Dividing Wall*, it prioritized making films with progressive humanistic content, which generally meant taking a stand against oppressive traditions as well as exposing and satirizing social inequalities, all under the banner of "guiding people to do good." We argue that the shift became increasingly evident as early as in 1952 and 1953, after the failed Yung Hwa strike and the violent "March First" clash, and it had become a prevalent tactic from the mid-1950s onward. With the rise and rapid expansion of MP&GI and Shaw Brothers, which pushed Hong Kong Mandarin cinema toward the direction of big-studio, big-budget, and entertainment-based productions in the second half of the 1950s (and beyond), "Patriotic" studios were forced to respond by focusing more on entertainment values and experimenting with various popular genres—even if this entailed, as in the case of *Sweet as Honey*, further thinning out the ideological commitment and edifying aspirations of their films.

Indeed, the attempts of pro-Communist studios to prioritize market demands and popular genre trends over ideological imperative continued well into the 1960s, as the rivalry between MP&GI and Shaw Brothers increased audiences' demand for production values and quick generic cycles. This can be seen in the way they tried to ride on the success of Shaw Brothers' "new school" (*xinpai*) martial arts films in the mid- to late 1960s and turned out their own swordplay movies. As Great Wall actor and director Hu Xiaofeng lamented: "Making films in Hong Kong is not determined by the artist but by the box-office. Trends and audience tastes are constantly changing. We are forced to follow the best-selling trends" ("Hu Xiaofeng" 2001, 169).

Our reconstruction of the "Patriotic" studios' shift of production strategy raises an important question: was there an increasing disappearance of Cold War ideological duality in Hong Kong

cinema with the rise of big studios and transformation of the cinema ecosystem? It is beyond the scope of this essay to address this question in a comprehensive way. Thus, we want to suggest by way of this epilogue that further research—especially when more films and archival materials become available—is needed to fully and systematically delineate how the Beijing-sponsored "Patriotic" studios endeavored to maintain its market presence and to fulfill what Sam Ho calls its "artistic mission" of telling China's story to overseas Chinese communities over time amid changing political, social, and film-industrial circumstances. What is clear, however, is that the history of pro-Communist filmmaking in Hong Kong was not as monolithic as one might think. Rather, it was a fascinating story, full of surprises and revelations, waiting to be discovered.

Special terms

Yibang zhi ge	一板之隔
Tiantian mimi	甜甜蜜蜜
Chuantong	傳統
Yang e	楊娥
dushu hui	讀書會
Yung Hwa	永華影業
Gongzi luonan	公子落難
Ta Kung Pao	大公報
Chang Cheng	長城影業
Feng Huang	鳳凰影業
Xinlian	新聯影業
Zhonglian	中聯影業
Nanfang	南方影業
Chang-Feng-Xin	長鳳新 (長城-鳳凰-新聯)
Xiangang dianying jie renwu cankao ziliao	香港電影節 人物參考資料
Xianggang dianying yu dianyingjie qingkuang cankao ziliao	香港電影與電影節 情況參考資料
Xianggang dianying zhipian gongsi qingkuang cankao ziliao	香港電影製片公司 情況參考資料
dao ren xiang shan	導人向善
Loon-Ma Film Company	龍馬影片公司
Spring in A Small Town	小城之春
Da Guangming	大光明
Nanguo	南國影業
Wushi niandai	五十年代影業公司
Hua guniang	花姑娘
Jianghu ernü	江湖兒女
Suishang renjia	水上人家
Nanlai yan	南來雁
A Night-Time Wife	禁婚記
Wu jiaqi	誤佳期
Huo fenghuang	火鳳凰
Xin honglou meng	新紅樓夢
Yi jia chun	一家春
Miyue	蜜月
Loves of the Youngsters	大兒女經
Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai	梁山伯與祝英台
huangmei diao	黃梅調
Yule shiye	娛樂事業
Zhongqiu yue	中秋月
Shuihuo zhi jian	水火之間
Kuangfeng zhi ye	狂風之夜
Wo shi yige nüren	我是一個女人
Yan'er mei	眼兒媚
Fuqi jing	夫妻經
Tianxian pei	天仙配
Shou shuyuan	搜書院
Diau Charn	貂蟬
Jiangshan meiren	江山美人
Wang laohu qiang qin	王老虎搶親
San kan yumei Liu Jinding	三看御妹劉金定
renxing	任性
zong daoyan	總導演
fuqi zhi dao	夫妻之道
Qingchang ru zhanchang	情場如戰場
Richu	日出
Taitai wansui	太太萬歲
Xinpai	新派

Notes

1. Box-office statistics from 1950s Hong Kong are hard to come by, but the limited evidence we have does indicate the market success of "Patriotic" films. In 1951, for instance, Li Pingqian's *A Night-Time Wife* (*Jin hun ji*), a Great Wall production, was the highest grossing Mandarin-language film in Hong Kong,

followed by three productions—Zhu Shilin's *Should They Marry?* (*Wu jiaqi*) and *Flower Girl* (*Hua guniang*), and Wang Weiyi's *The Fiery Phoenix* (*Huo fenghuang*)—by Loon-Ma and Wushi niandai, the two companies that would merge to become Feng Huang ("Yi jiu wu yi nian" 1952). Similarly, three films by Great Wall—Yue Feng's *Modern Red Chamber Dream* (*Xin honglou meng*),Tao Qin's *Father Marries Again* (*Yi jia chun*), and Li Pingqian's *Honeymoon* (*Miyue*)—held the top-grossing spots in 1952, while Zhu Shilin's *The Dividing Wall* was at the sixth place (Wang 1953). In 1955, Hu Xiaofeng's *Loves of the Youngsters* (*Da Ernü jing*) came in third place, while topping the box-office chart was Sang Hu and Huang Sha's *The Romance of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* (*Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai*, 1954), a Shanghai Yue opera film from China whose immense success in Hong Kong, as we shall see, would pave the way for the trend of costume opera films pursued by both Shaw Brothers and "patriotic" studios ("Yi jiu wu wu nian" 1956).

2. According to a report, *The Battle of Love* grossed more than HK$150,000 and broke the ten-year box-office record for Hong Kong Mandarin films ("*Qingchang ru zhanchang*" 1957).

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