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THE FILM INDUSTRY IN COMMUNIST CHINA

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INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the film industry in Communist China. It is part of a research program on international communication conducted by the Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The research for this paper was sponsored by the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense (ARPA) under contract #920F-9717 and monitored by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR) under contract AF 49(638)-1237.

This report seeks to update the data on the subject and to understand the dynamics of the Chinese Communist film industry. In order to put the present film industry into its proper socio-historical context, we also deal briefly with the Chinese films in pre-Communist era.

The report is based almost exclusively on Chinese publications. They include mainly Chinese Communist press reports and translated Chinese materials. Only three non-Communist books (Chinese) could be found on Chinese films and our brief discussion on the pre-Communist period was based on them. We were particularly interested in statistical information on the present Chinese film industry. Yet propaganda-free statistical reports from Communist China were hard to come by. After 1959 even publications of propagandistic statistical information from Communist China stopped. Since 1964 there have been some signs of the availability of such statistics but systematic statistical reports such as those published before 1957 have not yet appeared. We have practically exhausted all the major sources on this subject in Chinese which are publicly available abroad. We have combed the holdings in such major libraries as the Chinese-Japanese Library and the East Asian Research Center at Harvard University, The Library of Congress and the Hoover Institute at Stanford University. As our research continues, new information will be acquired. This report, re-

presenting research done so far, will be enlarged and updated in the future.

CHAPTER ONE

From Pre-Communist to Communist China

In 1906, a Shanghai vaudeville theater placed the following advertisement in a local newspaper:

"We have bought a fascinating picture. It was made by a foreign 'electric-photographer' (Tien-Kuan-Shih). In the picture, men, animals, and all things move every second. The picture is also illuminated by electric lights. It has been shown to the imperial court. We hope you will come to see it.

"Every night from 9 o'clock to 12 midnight. First-class ticket, \$0.60 and second-class ticket, \$0.40." ¹

This was the first Chinese motion picture and that vaudeville theater was the first Chinese cinema. The foreign "electric-photographer" was a Spaniard whose name, in Chinese, sounded like "Ramus." This first showing, a big success, stimulated Chinese entrepreneurs to open their own film companies.

The first Chinese film company was established in Nanking in 1917 and, by 1926, there were already 40 private film companies in Shanghai. Yet, because of keen competition, only 20 companies remained in 1928. By then Shanghai had 36 movie houses. In the same year six private film companies merged into one, which began to expand its business outside of Shanghai. Soon the cities in Kiangsu and Chekiang, where electricity was adequate, were full of movie houses.² Domestic film production reached its peak in 1934 when 101 feature

¹Hung Yin, Tien-Ying Shih-Hua (History of Motion Pictures), Hong Kong: Shuen Wen Book Store, 1955. p. 247.

²Yang Chun, Chung-Kuo Tien-Ying San-Shih-Nien (Thirty Years of Chinese Film Industry), Hong Kong: World Publishing Company, 1954. pp. 6-21.

films³ were produced and the number of film companies reached an all-time high of 64 in Shanghai.⁴

The Sino-Japanese War came in 1937 and Shanghai fell into the hands of the Japanese. All but four film companies closed down.

During this first stage of film development, the Nationalist government had made two major attempts to regulate the film industry. In 1933 a film censorship and guidance board was set up under the Executive Yuan, and a set of rules was issued to ban films which might promote superstition, crimes or hostility toward the government. In 1936, the Ministry of Education set up a committee for educational motion pictures. Mobile projection teams were formed, equipped with projectors (mostly of the 16 m.m. type), generators, screens, slide projectors, and record players. The nation was divided into 81 districts for mobile showings of educational films.⁵ This was the Nationalist Chinese government's attempt to modernize the nation via film showing. Japan's invasion ended this too.

The Sino-Japanese war had wiped out almost the whole Chinese film industry established in the pre-war era. In the areas free from Japanese control, the Nationalist government owned the film enterprises. Feature films, most of which had war themes, were produced in Chungking and mobile teams brought newsreels and documentaries (on war) to the villagers under the Nationalist government's administration.⁶

The private film industry revived after the war and Shanghai was again the headquarters of Chinese motion pictures.

³Films based on scripts and acted out by professional actors and actresses.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Wang Tse-lun, Chung-Kuo Ying Chu Shih (History of Chinese Theater and Cinema), Taipei: Chien Kuo Publishing Company, 1960. pp. 31-36.

⁶Ibid., pp. 59-63.

A government film censorship board was also set up in Shanghai. When the Communists took Shanghai in mid-1949, they took over three big cinema studios and 40 cinema houses formerly owned by the Nationalist government. At that time there were about six major private film companies in Shanghai.

However, the Chinese Communist Party's experience with motion pictures did not begin in 1949. As early as 1932, Chinese Communist literary workers had started infiltrating film companies in Shanghai. The underground Communist film workers included Hsia Yen, now Peking's Vice Minister of Culture and Tsai Chu-sheng, now Chairman of the Fraternal Association of Chinese Film Workers on the mainland. By 1933 almost all publications dealing with film art and reviews were under the direct or indirect control of Communist underground workers or Communist sympathizers.⁷

Meanwhile, in Yen-an, a movie-showing and producing group had been set up in 1938. Having only one 35 m.m. projector sent by the Soviet Union, one 16 m.m. projector, and three generators, this group could only make documentary films.⁸ This film unit was an instrument for political indoctrination and propaganda. Never in Communist literature was film showing referred to as a medium for entertainment. This use of film as a medium for political propaganda became a model for the film industry on the Chinese mainland after 1949.

As the civil war spread after 1945, greater areas came under Communist control. In 1947, the Soviet Union helped the Chinese Communists build the Northwest Film Technology Institute. The Soviets facilitated the Communist Chinese take-over of Manchuria and the Communists took over a former

⁷ Jen-Min Jih Pao (People's Daily), November 16, 1957.

⁸ Chen Chi-hua, et. al., Chung-Kuo Tien-Ying Fa-Chuan Shih (History of the Development of Chinese Cinema), Vol. 2., Peking: Chung-Kuo Tien Ying (Chinese Cinema) Publishing Company, 1963. pp. 357-360.

Manchukuo⁹ film plant in Hsin San, Kirin province. It was changed into the Communist-operated Tung Pei (Northeast) Film Studio. This studio produced chiefly documentaries on battles in the civil war.

In January, 1949, Peking surrendered to the Communists without a fight. The Communists took over the well-preserved Nationalist-owned film industry in Peking, including one film studio, two offices and nine cinema houses.¹⁰ The Communists' subsequent take-over of Shanghai and the rest of mainland China marked the end of private film industry on the Chinese mainland. A new state-owned film industry grew out of this small, yet at one time vigorous private Chinese film enterprise.

⁹The puppet regime in Manchuria set up by the Japanese in World War II.

¹⁰Chen Chi-hua, et. al., ibid., pp. 396-397.

CHAPTER TWO

Film Development under the Communist Government

The Process of Nationalization

Shanghai was the center of the Chinese film industry in the pre-Communist era and naturally the Peking regime's nationalization of the Chinese film industry began in Shanghai.

To control the film industry, the Chinese Communists undertook three major tasks: to take over the Nationalist-owned studios and facilities, to nationalize the private film companies and to get rid of foreign films, mainly Anglo-American ones, and their agents.

The take-over of the Nationalist-owned film properties was smooth. Former Communist underground workers now emerged and reorganized the old studios and movie houses. In November, 1949, the Shanghai Film Studio was established as a result of the take-over of several former Nationalist studios in Shanghai. The new staff was composed of members of the former Communist underground and new cadres from Yenan.¹¹

The nationalization of private companies and the elimination of Anglo-American films took the familiar form of a Communist mobilized mass movement. The Communists first organized the Association of Shanghai Theatrical and Film Workers (June 18, 1949). It enrolled 959 members who underwent indoctrination on Marxism-Leninism. The "progressive" members were dispatched to conduct oral agitation in factories, schools and street corners to herald the arrival of new films and plays. Old films were condemned as "bourgeois."¹²

In March, 1951, 26 "people's films" were put on nationwide exhibit as a prelude to the take-over of the private film industry in China.¹³ In 1952 the regime merged eight privately-

¹¹Chen Chi-hua, et. al., op. cit., p. 405.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 6, 1957.
p. 3.

owned film studios in Shanghai into the "state and private jointly operated" China United Film Studio.¹⁴ In February, 1953, the state took over the only remaining private studio and the nationalization of the film industry was complete.¹⁵

The elimination of Anglo-American films had begun before the nationalization of private film companies. In September, 1949, four months after the Communist take-over, the Shanghai Liberation Daily (Chieh-Fang Jih-Pao) published many "letters to the editor" urging the regime to ban Hollywood films. Some of the letters were written by well-known script writers, directors and film stars. Then the Shanghai Bureau of Literary Affairs met and announced that the government would take immediate steps to inspect the imported films and that all pictures whose contents were "inconsistent with morality and the interests of the Chinese people in general" would be banned.

By the middle of 1950, the Communists declared that American and British films no longer dominated Shanghai's cinema houses and soon would be completely banned. They reported that only one film theater in Hangchow (Chekiang province) was still showing American films and that Nanking was totally rid of Anglo-American films by the end of 1949. In Peking and Tientsin the last showing of American films was in July, 1950, soon after the outbreak of the Korean War.¹⁶

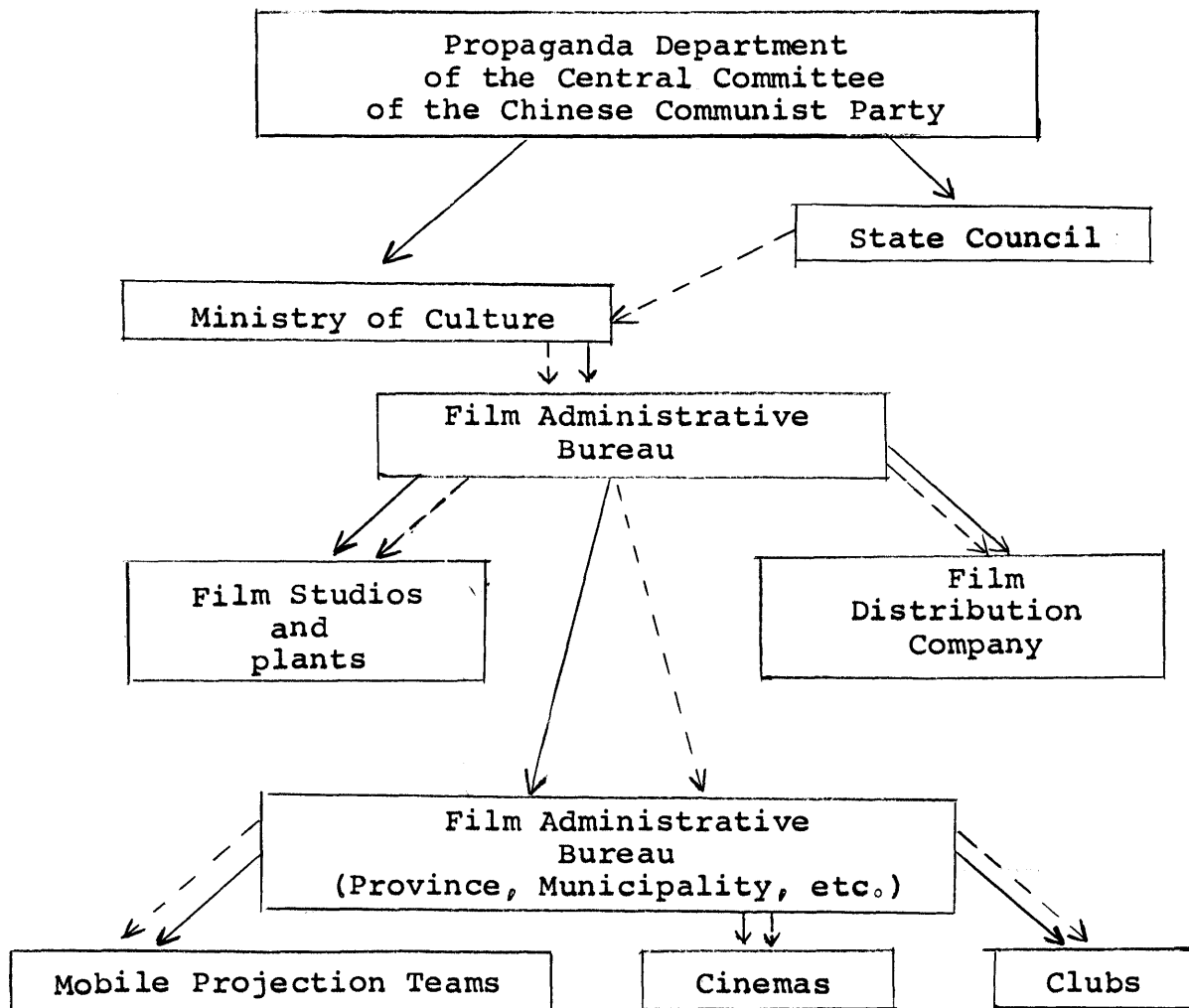
¹⁴Ta-Kung Pao (The Impartial Daily), January 20, 1952.

¹⁵Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), October 18, 1954.

¹⁶Franklin W. Houn, To Change A Nation, New York: The Free Press, 1961. p. 208.

The Structure of the Communist Film Industry

Chart I: The Structural Pyramid of Film
Administration in Communist China



" ————— " represents policy control.

" - - - - - → " represents formal administrative subordination.

Now all the obstacles were eliminated and the stage was set for the development of a purely Communist film industry in China. In 1949 the regime established the Film Administrative Bureau under the Ministry of Culture. The Bureau was responsible for the reconstruction of the film industry and nationalization of film companies in China during the early 1950's. The China Film Distribution Company, whose duties included the distribution of both foreign and domestic films, was set up in 1951.

By 1952, Communist China had three major film studios: Changchun Film Studio in Kirin province, Peking Film Studio, and the Shanghai Film Studio. Films were being shown by 746 cinema houses and some 1,800 mobile projection teams roving around factories and villages.¹⁷

The Changchun Studio was the fountainhead for new Communist film workers. From 1949 to 1954, this studio had trained about a thousand film cadres to work in all corners of China. Now it has a thousand employees. It is also the major studio that dubbed Soviet and East European films into Chinese sound track. More than 117 films from those nations were dubbed by this studio from 1949 to 1954.¹⁸

In 1953, as the regime intensified its industrialization in the First Five-Year Plan (1952-1957), the Shanghai Film Studio was transformed into the Shanghai Scientific and Educational Film Studio, specializing in documentaries dealing with technology and science.¹⁹

After the replacement of private studios by state-operated film studios, the production of feature films slowed down. In 1951, not a single feature film was turned out by the state-operated studios.²⁰ This situation prompted the Party

¹⁷Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 18, 1956.

¹⁸Ibid., No. 18, 1954, pp. 16-17.

¹⁹Survey of China Mainland Press, Hong Kong: U.S. Consulate General, No. 508 (1953), p. 7.

²⁰Survey of China Mainland Magazines (SCMM), Hong Kong: U.S. Consulate General, No. 123 (1958), pp. 24-36.

to convene the National Conference of Film and Art Workers in Peking in 1953. Subsequently, a five-year plan for film development was drawn up. There was no liberalization of ideological control, but a production quota system was devised. All the resolutions of this conference were approved by the State Council, the highest executive branch of the government, on December 24, 1953, and published on January 12, 1954, in two sets: "Decision on the Strengthening of Film Production" and "The Establishment of the Film Industry and a Film Showing Network."

The decision on film production stipulated that in the coming four years the annual targets were to be 12 to 15 feature films, 15 scientific and educational films, 30 documentary films, a weekly newsreel and a number of cartoons. Films from the Soviet Union and the "People's Democracies" were to be dubbed into Chinese sound track. Their number was to be equal to the number of the domestically produced films.²¹

The government's answer to the shortage of feature films was to ask the help of the Union of Chinese Writers, the Political Department of the People's Liberation Army, Labor Unions and the Young Communist League. It demanded that those organizations assign and mobilize their members to write film scripts.

On the expansion of the film-showing network, the government gave first priority to industrial and mining areas. The strategy was to build cinema houses in large cities and to increase mobile projection teams in small cities and rural areas. A projector industry was to be built to enable China to be self-sufficient in projector supply. The two projector factories (Nanking and Harbin) were to be enlarged to produce 280 large projectors and 2,500 small projectors every year.²²

²¹Jen-Min Jih Pao (People's Daily), January 12, 1954.

²²Ibid.

In 1954 two new film studios were built in Peking. They were the Central Newsreels and Documentary Film Studio and the Peking Scientific Film Studio. The documentary studio was to produce not only films on current events but also films on China's historical and scenic spots to introduce the country's geography, art and culture.²³

There is also a military film studio in Peking. It was established in 1952 under the name of "People's Liberation Army Film Studio." Later the name was changed to "Pa-I" Film Studio. "Pa-I" means "August 1," the date in 1927 when the Chinese Red Army was formally organized. Staffed mostly by veterans, the studio specialized in feature and documentary films with military themes. It became increasingly productive after 1957 as the military films began to exceed films with other themes. From 1952 to 1956 this studio made 23 military-educational films, six political-educational films, 58 documentaries, and three feature films and translated 80 foreign films, mostly from the Soviet Union.²⁴ In 1960, this studio made China's first stereoscopic color film, "A Trip to Likiang," to describe the natural beauty of Kwangsi province.²⁵

Another noteworthy documentary film studio is the Agricultural Film Studio under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture. Established in 1949, this studio at first could produce only slides and 16 m.m. silent films. Beginning in 1956, it concentrated on producing sound films, mainly documentaries on agricultural technology and events in villages. In 1960 a regular newsreel series was produced by this studio, "News from People's Communes." Otherwise, this studio's main duty is to popularize science among the peasantry through film showings.²⁶

²³Survey of China Mainland Press (SCMP), No. 905 (1954), pp. 39-40.

²⁴Ibid., No. 2553 (1961), p. 3.

²⁵Wen Yi Pao (Literary Gazette), Peking, No. 19, 1957. p. 9.

²⁶Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 5, 1960. p. 28.

Throughout this period, the Party cautioned repeatedly against the concentration of film studios in a few cities. But concentration occurred nevertheless. Of the eight studios mentioned so far, one is in Changchun, five in Peking and two in Shanghai. Before 1956 they constituted all the film studios in China.

In late 1956 the Film Administrative Bureau held a number of conferences to discuss this situation. Subsequently a proposal for reform of the film industry was submitted to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The main points in the proposal were the decentralization of film administration and production, liberalization of the censorship of film scripts and more opportunities for veteran actors and actresses trained in the pre-Communist era. The Party approved the decentralization items but paid only lip service to the liberalization of censorship.

The decentralization of film production began with the building of a major film studio in northwest China. This was the Sian Film Studio in Shensi province. The studio was designed by Soviet specialists. Construction was completed in 1959 and the studio was expected to produce 12 feature films a year along with a large number of newsreels and documentaries.²⁷

The Shanghai United Film Studio was reorganized in April, 1957, and split into five small studios, of which three specialized in feature films, one in cartoons and one in dubbing foreign films into Chinese. Directors were said to be given more authority in choosing their actors. But film scripts had to be approved by the Shanghai Film Company which supervised all five newly-created studios.²⁸

In the same year, construction of a studio in Canton was under way. The studio was fully equipped with modern facilities including a transformer station capable of supplying from 3,000 to 3,500 kilowatts of electricity. When com-

²⁷ SCMP, No. 1756 (1958), p. 50.

²⁸ Ibid., No. 1506 (1957), pp. 16-17.

pleted, it could produce 12 to 16 feature films every year aside from newsreels and documentaries. This studio was given special responsibility for dubbing films from Mandarin²⁹ into the Cantonese dialect.³⁰ The regime was apparently strengthening the propaganda it directed toward the overseas Chinese in Indo-China and Malaya, since Cantonese is the dialect of these audiences.

The studios in Sian and Canton represented the major investments that the regime made in the film industry after 1953. The decentralization of film production increased in tempo in 1958. After a "Leap Forward Conference" was called in Peking of all the film units in China, the slogan, "A film studio in every province, a cinema house in every country, and a projection team in every township!" appeared in the Communist press.

Film studios designed primarily for producing newsreels were set up in Kiangsu, Hupeh, Hopei, Fukien, Yunnan, Shensi, Shangtung, Kwangtung, Chekiang, Anhwei, Inner Mongolia, Kwangsi, Szechuan, and Sinkiang. They have covered practically all the territory of mainland China except for Tibet. Up to the present Tibet has neither a film studio nor a wired radio network. Occasionally mobile projection teams visit this lone wide frontier of China.

All those film studios built in the Leap Forward movement were actually transformations of film repair shops in the provinces. These new studios are mainly designed to produce newsreels and documentaries on economic or political events. The first film produced by the Fukien Studio was a short documentary, "In Various Parts of Fukien," and the first film by the Inner Mongolia Studio was "Inner Mongolia in Brief."³¹ In this period of intense industrialization

²⁹ Mandarin is China's national language.

³⁰ SCMP, No. 1462 (1957), pp. 23-24.

³¹ SCMP, No. 1806 (1958), p. 36.

these documentaries and newsreels were intended to help carry through the Party's economic campaigns. The number of film studios, by the end of 1959, stood at 40.

The year, 1960, marked the end of the Leap Forward on every front of China's industry and so also in the film industry.

Table I: Film Studios in Communist China³²

Location	Feature studio	Cartoon studio	Newsreel studio	Scientific-Educational studio	Dubbing studio
Peking	2	-	1	1	-
Changchun	1	-	-	-	-
Shanghai	2	1	-	1	1
Sian	1	-	-	-	-
Canton	1	-	-	-	-
Total					12
1) Provincial studios					22
2) County studios					3
3) Experimental Film studio					1
4) Slide studio					1
5) Ministry of Agriculture studio					1
Grand Total					40

The Technical Base for Development

The growth of film studios in mainland China required serious efforts by the Peking regime to develop film technology.

In 1950 a committee on film technology was formed under

³²From unclassified U.S. Information Service research report, "Development of Communist China's Film Industry in 1961:" The three county studios are in Nantung (Kiangsu), Changling Hsien (Kirin) and Tangshan District (Hopei).

the Film Administrative Bureau. This committee enlisted all prominent film technicians in China. The committee carried out research and translated foreign publications. In 1953 a Soviet advisory group helped the committee draw up a five-year plan for developing film technology, and equipment used in film production was centralized. With the assistance of the Soviets, Communist China began to produce color films.³³

By 1957 the nation had three major motion picture equipment plants in Nanking, Harbin and Shanghai. From 1951 to 1957, 7,000 projectors were produced.³⁴ The Nanking Film Machinery Plant was the most productive, turning out 3,000 to 4,000 projectors a year.³⁵ Most of these were 16mm projectors. By 1957 the Nanking plant also made portable projectors for newsreels and documentaries.³⁶ In the same year, the Harbin plant made the nation's first batch of 15 color film projectors, copying Soviet models.³⁷

On April 30, 1958, the Peking Film Developing and Printing Laboratory went into trial operation after two years of construction. It was equipped with Czechoslovakian machines; technicians from that nation had helped build this plant. This was China's first plant with completely automatic developing and printing facilities. When it became fully operational in late 1958, it could develop 60 million meters of film per year.³⁸

Communist China also started its first modern photographic chemical plant in 1958 in Paoting, Hopei province. It was designed by Chinese engineers with Russian assistance.

³³Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 14, 1957, p. 24.

³⁴Ibid., No. 4, 1957. p. 24.

³⁵Ibid., The Nanking plant probably was not operational until after 1957 and hence from 1951 to 1957 the regime was able only to turn out 7,000 projectors.

³⁶Ibid., No. 8, 1957. p. 32.

³⁷SCMP, No. 1550 (1957), p. 1

³⁸Ibid., No. 1766 (1958), p. 20.

When completed, it was expected to produce 350 million meters of film a year, both black-and-white and color.³⁹ The developing and recording machines were both made in the Harbin plant, which also began to make wide-screen films in 1958.

Yet the available projectors and number of copies of produced film remained insufficient to meet the Communist ambition of "a cinema house in every county and a projection team in every township." Thus, for example, Vice Minister of Culture, Hsia Yen, once said:

"Third, judging from requirements, every hsien (county) shall have a cinema house. There are more than 2,000 hsiens in the country. Given the production capacity of the existing studios, there will not be any difficulty in satisfying the requirement in a few years' time. But it will not be an easy task to realize the aim that every hsiang (township) shall have its own projection team, since there are approximately 90,000 hsiangs in the country, and the present number of less than 10,000 film projection teams must be increased to 90,000. Then, should we allow people in the comparatively advanced areas, which are in the minority, to see pictures shown by the 35 mm film projectors, or allow more people to enjoy pictures shown by the 16 mm film projectors? Obviously the latter course is more urgent."⁴⁰

It also seems that the government was able to replace only a small number of the worn-out projectors in the nation in 1963. The Film Administrative Bureau issued 800 new projectors to replace old ones and another 300 16mm projectors to build new projection teams, mainly in industrial centers for showings of scientific-and-educational films.⁴¹

³⁹ SCMP, No. 1932 (1959), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁰ Wen-Wei Pao (Wen-Wei Daily), September 15, 1959.

⁴¹ Kwang-Ming Jih-Pao (Kwangming Daily), April 12, 1963. The discrepancy between the 1957 production capacity of 3000 projectors and the 1963 figure of only 1100 projectors distributed by the Film Administrative Bureau reflects either a decline in production or, more likely, the fact that projectors have other customers besides projection teams, e.g.: military, educational, administrative, etc.

Film copy supply was still another problem that the regime was unable to solve momentarily. The Communists were particularly anxious to see that enough copies of newsreels were available for showings all over China. At the present the regime has

Table II: Yearly Production⁴² of Projectors in Communist China

Year	Number of Projectors
1952	319
1953	1,153
1954	259
1955	1,652
1956	3,400
1957	3,000
Total	9,783

set up a system in which certain localities are copy-controlling centers and others have to share copies with these centers. Only those domestic films that the Party considers important are made in enough copies for every province and autonomous region of the country. Foreign films are all shared among the provinces (see Appendix). The regional centers that usually control film copies are Peking and Liaoning for northeast China, Shanghai for central and east China, Hupei and Szechuan for west-central China and Shensi for northwest China.

The shortage of film copies can be seen from the two samples presented in Tables III and IV. The copy circulation of the films, "Ten Years of Inner Mongolia" and "New Life of Taichen Island," was quite limited. Of China's 28 provinces and special municipalities, more than 20 did not have a copy of those films.

⁴²The 1952-1955 figures are from the Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), No. 18, 1956; the 1956 figure is from the same journal, No. 4, 1957; and the 1957 figure is from the unclassified research report, "Development of Communist China's Film Industry in 1959," Hong Kong: U.S.I.S., 1960, p. 89.

Table III: Distribution of Film Copies
of Six Newsreels in 1957⁴³

Film Title	Total Number of Copies	No. of Provinces & Municipalities Obtaining Copies	No. of Provinces & Municipalities Not Obtaining Copies
"A Trip to Five Nations"	16	15	13
"Premier Chou in Hungary"	24	14	9
"A Thousand Miles' Journey to Visit Relatives"	16	12	16
"An Open Secret"	22	17	11
"Ten Years of Inner Mongolia"	8	8	20
"New Life of Tachen Island"	6	6	22

Table IV: Type of Projection Units
and Number of Film Copies in 1956 and 1957.⁴⁴

	1956	1957
No. of 35 mm. projector units	1,827	2,485
Average number of copies per newsreel serial	98	94
Average number of copies per "Sports in Brief" serial	38	30
Average number of copies per "Young Pioneer" serial	37	30
Average number of copies per black-and-white newsreel serial (short form)	46	28

⁴³Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), July 23, 1957.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Table V: Increase of Film Copy Supply
(Unit of Copy-Kilometer)⁴⁵

Year	35 mm. Black-and-White Film Copies	35 mm. Color Film Copies	16 mm. Black-and-White Film Copies
1952	9,277	-	3,499
1953	12,511	-	4,628
1954	12,855	-	5,153
1955	12,409	-	7,353
1956	15,470*	24*	10,396*

Notes:

"-" stands for lack of information.

* These 1956 figures are estimates based on the half-year figures given as 7,735 for 35 mm. black-and-white films, 12 for 35 mm. color films and 5,198 for 16 mm. black-and-white films. The annual figures are obtained simply by doubling the half-year figures.

⁴⁵Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 18, 1956.

Growth of Cinema and Projection Teams

In pre-Communist China, cinema houses were largely privately owned. The Nationalist government had some state-operated cinemas and some equipment for mobile showings. The Communists started with about 596 cinema houses, which were concentrated in East China and in cities, and about a hundred mobile teams. It was easier to expand mobile teams than to build cinema houses; the Chinese Communists are quite experienced in operating mobile teams.

The Communists gave first priority to expanding mobile teams in industrial areas. A film showing section was set up in all the labor unions in China and conferences were called periodically to review the film showings among the workers. Over the years the growth of labor union mobile teams has been rapid (see Table VI).

Mobile projection teams also toured the countryside bringing news and facts to the illiterate peasantry. By 1955 there was already one film projection team for every county in China, which meant that there were at least 2,000 mobile projection teams.

Nevertheless, the regime's target of letting every township have its own team had not been reached. In 1958, 80 per cent of the counties

Table VI: Growth of Labor Union Mobile Projection Teams⁴⁶

Year	No. of Mobile Teams
1951	150
1954	1,471
1956	1,656
1958	2,588
1959	over 2,000

⁴⁶The 1951 and 1956 figures are from the Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), No. 18, 1956, p. 37; the 1954 and 1958 figures are from Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 18, 1959, p. 12; and the 1959 figure is from SCMP, No. 63 (1961), p. 35.

on the mainland still had no cinema. It was planned that, by 1963, 90 per cent of the counties would have their own cinemas and there would be one team for every three townships.⁴⁷ But a check on the growth of cinemas and mobile teams after 1958 found a very slight increase. On the whole the present situation is just as it was in 1958.

Aside from cinema houses and mobile teams, there are the so-called cinema clubs. How these cinema clubs operate is not known. They may be another type of organized audience who go to movies regularly. The majority of the participants may very well be students and workers.

In 1957 Communist China started building wide-screen cinema houses with the so-called cinemascope screens. Peking was the first to have this type of cinema. The former Peking Cinema House was adapted to cinemascope films with the help of Soviet and East German technicians.⁴⁸ But the equipment was purchased from France.⁴⁹ The first wide-screen film shown was the Russian, "Prelude to Revolution."

The second wide-screen was installed in Canton, again in an old cinema. The new cinema was reported to have a lounge which could accomodate 300 people at a time.⁵⁰ The same Russian film, "Prelude to Revolution," was shown.

In April, 1958, Harbin had its wide-screen theater with 1,400 seats.⁵¹ By the end of 1959, 14 major cities of China had wide-screen cinemas and in all of them the debut was the same "Prelude to Revolution."

In 1960 Peking also had China's first theater that showed 3-dimensional films.⁵² This type of cinema has not spread beyond Peking.

⁴⁷Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), June 3, 1958.

⁴⁸Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 8, 1957, p. 32.

⁴⁹SCMP, No. 1563 (1957), p. 4.

⁵⁰Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 22, 1957, p. 33.

⁵¹SCMP, No. 1760 (1958), p. 16

⁵²Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 23, 1960, p. 17.

Table VII: Growth of Film Showing
Units in Communist China⁵³

Year	Cinema	Team	Club	Total
1949	596	100	50	746
1950	641	522	100	1,263
1951	724	734	200	1,658
1952	746	1,110	426	2,282
1953	779	2,154	946	3,879
1954	815	2,723	1,384	4,922
1955	868	3,742	1,232	5,842
1956	938	4,400	1,217	6,555
1957	1,030	6,692	1,477	9,209
1958	1,386	8,384	2,032	12,802
1959	1,758	9,212	4,102	15,072
1960	-	-	-	14,565
1961	-	-	-	-
1962	-	9,000	-	-
1963	-	9,000	-	-
1964	2,000	12,000	4,000	18,000

⁵³The 1949-1956 figures are from Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), No. 18, 1956; the 1957 and 1958 figures are from Ten Great Years, Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1960, p. 207 and "Development of Communist China Film Industry in 1959," Hong Kong: U.S.I.S., 1960, p. 90; the 1959 figures are from Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 12, 1959, p. 1; the 1960 figures are from Communist China Digest, Joint Publications Research Service, No. 20, July 26, 1960, p. 8; the 1962 figures are from Ta-Kung Pao (The Impartial Daily), December 14, 1962; and the 1963 figures are from Evergreen, Peking, No. 2, (April, 1963), pp. 46-47. The 1964 figures are from SCMP, No. 3204, pp. 19-20.

Note:

"-" stands for lack of data.

CHAPTER THREE

Film Production in Communist China

While the increase in cinemas and mobile showing teams was at first phenomenal under the Communist regime, the same can not be said of the production of films, especially feature films. However, two types of film, the documentary-newsreel and the scientific-educational film, have grown rapidly in the past decade.

Documentary and Newsreel

The Chinese Communists have long experience in making documentaries and newsreels, for in Yen-an the primitive Communist movie unit could produce only documentaries and newsreels. Also, the Communists fully appreciated the impact that documentaries and newsreels could have on audiences in a land like China where illiteracy was high.

A Communist report calls newsreels and documentaries, "Party press in film form." "They are based on the Party's ideology and use film technique to discuss a problem. They do not reflect reality in the manner of purely objective reporting or recording."⁵⁴ Thus, the Communist Chinese newsreels and documentaries are full of exhortations to produce more and to promote nationalism and global revolution. There are, of course, some newsreels that contain more or less straight reporting of events such as sports.

The headquarters for newsreel and documentary production in China is the Central Newsreels and Documentary Film Studio in Peking, which was built in 1953. Among the studio's regular series are "News in Brief," an average of one reel every week; "New Villages," an average of one reel every month; "China Today," an average of one reel every month and intended for overseas audiences; and "New Sports" and "New Children," generally bi-monthly.

⁵⁴Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette), Peking, No. 6, 1959, p. 14.

With the start of the "agricultural cooperatives" in 1955, the studio almost doubled its yearly output--from 35 to 65 titles a year. The emphasis was agriculture. In the 1956 plan of 220 reels of documentaries and newsreels, half of them were on agriculture and industry. Shorter series were adopted to allow a variety of subjects.⁵⁵

The Chinese Communists imported from the Soviet Union the idea of a "newsreel cinema." China's first newsreel cinema was founded in Tientsin in 1954. It was said to have 780 seats. At first, showings of newsreels were alternated with feature films in order to attract audiences. But, as the Communists pointed out, newsreels proved so popular with the people that soon this cinema showed newsreels and documentaries exclusively. However, the bulk of the audiences was actually organized or compelled to attend newsreel showings. They came in groups from schools, government agencies, factories and even as residents of a whole street, presumably mobilized by a so-called Neighborhood Committee.⁵⁶

It was reported that in October, 1954, some 109,000 residents of Tientsin were mobilized to attend the newsreel cinema, which meant the average daily attendance was 3,516 people with a minimum of five showings daily. The population of Tientsin was 2,693,831 in 1955. Assuming that 70 per cent of them were adults (15 years old and older) and that each adult attended the cinema house only once in that month, then the above newsreel audience figure means that one out of 17.2 adults in Tientsin in October, 1954, had been to the newsreel cinema. It was also reported that in Shanghai one newsreel cinema had 130,834 admissions in January and 145,042 in February of 1955. Assuming the same as we did in the case of Tientsin, then an average of one out of 31.4 adults in Shanghai had been to the newsreel

⁵⁵Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 1, 1956.

⁵⁶Ibid., No. 23, 1954.

cinema in those two months.⁵⁷ In Peking the number of newsreel showings decreased from 900 in 1956 to 659 in 1957 and attendance fell from 372,063 to 228,052.⁵⁸

Then the year of 1958 caught every Chinese and every aspect of his life in the leap. This was the era of newsreels and documentaries. Not only were newsreels or documentaries as such produced on a massive scale but they were also made into what were called "feature-documentary" films. The Ministry of Culture's decision for a "Great Leap Forward" in film production states:

"All motion picture studios must continue to inspire the ardor of the masses of the people in the big forward leap, to fully implement the policy of achieving greater, faster, better and more economical results in the motion picture industry, and to energetically strive for overfulfillment of production targets. At the same time, the theme of feature films planned for production in various studios must reflect the current situation of a great leap forward as much as possible. If shooting has not yet started, movie scripts must instantly be revised accordingly. Any movie script that is not up to this standard must be dropped. Creative writers must be mobilized instantly to proceed to industrial and agricultural production tents and other construction sites of various provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions. New persons and new deeds may be photographed into feature films, feature-documentaries, or ordinary documentaries. These films may be produced in full or medium length. Several short features and documentaries may be grouped together into a full-length picture under one title.

"...newsreels, documentaries and scientific-educational films must be made to play a greater role under the present situation. In the face of the great leap forward, more films that meet the taste of the masses of the people must be produced rapidly. Motion

⁵⁷ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 9, 1955, p. 29.

⁵⁸ Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), July 23, 1957.

picture films that depict the leap forward in industry and agriculture must take up a higher proportion of films. Reporting and publicity on the technological and cultural revolutions must be strengthened. Advanced experiences and technical innovations created by the masses of the people must be popularized...⁵⁹

We mentioned previously that in 1958 all provinces and autonomous regions except Tibet set up their own film studios. These were, in reality, newsreel studios which produce mainly short newsreels on the intensification of local industrialization and collectivization. Thus, for example, the first film of the Canton studio was, "Canton Constructs;" the first film of the Sian studio was, "Shensi News;" the first film of the Chekiang studio, "Chekiang News in Brief;" and the first film of the Anhwei studio, "Anhwei News."⁶⁰

Newsreel cinemas also increased during this period. At the end of 1957, mainland China had 13 newsreel cinema houses. A conference on newsreels and documentaries resolved that by the end of 1958 there should be 50 cinemas around the nation showing newsreels exclusively.⁶¹ In Tientsin, there were six newsreel cinema houses in 1958. Seventeen shows were given daily by each newsreel cinema and tickets were sold that covered a whole month.⁶² These cinemas were reported to have an attendance of more than 10,000 daily, an average of 1,666 persons for each cinema every day and about 100 per showing.⁶³

From 1958 to 1959, 2,368 reels of documentaries and

⁵⁹ SCMP, No. 1787 (1958), p. 33.

⁶⁰ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 11, 1958, p. 11.

⁶¹ Ibid., No. 13, 1958.

⁶² Ibid., No. 11, 1958, p. 10.

⁶³ SCMP, No. 1804 (1958), p. 22.

newsreels were produced, or 987 hours of showing.⁶⁴ The total newsreel audience was reported to be 80 million. With the end of the Great Leap Forward, there was a general setback in all aspects of Communist China's industry, the film included. But the need for documentaries and newsreels became even more urgent--particularly documentaries on simple agricultural technology. It was at this juncture that the First National Conference on the Work of Newsreels and Documentaries was called in Peking in 1960. The conference resolved that "the newsreel and documentary film studios, particularly the regional ones, will greatly increase the number of newsreels and documentaries to help the peasants in solving agricultural problems."⁶⁵

In the same year the Agricultural Ministry's studio turned out a new regular documentary series, "News from the People's Communes." The debut of the serial included five items: "Chairman Mao Inspects the People's Communes," "Fight Drought till Our Provisions are Insured," "Contest of Paddy-Planting Machines," "Eliminate Diseases in Potatoes," and "From West to East and South to North" (general report of people's communes in the nation).⁶⁶

Aside from these agricultural documentaries, regular newsreels included special features such as one on Mao Tse-tung's swimming across the Yangtze River in 1958, one on Sputnik in 1957 and one on the arrest of an alleged agent from Taiwan, "the omnipotent Chao," filmed on the scene by arrangement with the Security Bureau.

⁶⁴This estimate is based on a report on the Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection) (Peking, No. 8, 1959, p. 1) which says that a 400-foot film runs for 10 minutes, while one reel of film equals 1,000 feet. Then 2,368,000 feet of film will take 987 hours. However, according to the U.S. standard, it takes 2,200 feet of film to run for 60 minutes. Then 2,368,000 feet of film will take 1,076 hours. We use the Communist Chinese standard in order to be consistent with other statistical information from Communist China that has been used in this report.

⁶⁵SCMP, No. 2212 (1960), p. 16

⁶⁶Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), No. 5, 1960.

Newsreels on foreign lands were also shown; an increasing number dealt with the Afro-Asian nations. The Central Newsreel and Documentary Studio turned out 81 documentaries in 1961 which included films about Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe, such as "Fighting Cuba" and "The Horn of Africa."

A documentary, "The True Face of Kennedy,"

was shown in 1962. It was produced by the army "Pa I" Studio. The film portrayed the late U.S. president as a "Puppet of two big financial groups in the U.S." The theme was that the "true face" of Kennedy was like the U.S. national emblem--an olive branch and arrows--which the film interpreted as, "When frustrated, the enemy (U.S.) waves the olive branch, but when it bares its viciousness, it shoots arrows."⁶⁸ In the same year and amidst some daring commando actions taken by the Nationalist government against the mainland, the "Pa I" Studio released a documentary, "People's Enemy Chiang Kai-shek," which concluded with scenes of a "well-prepared People's Liberation Army, ready to smash any intrusion and aggression."⁶⁹ In 1963, this studio also produced a documentary on the Sino-Indian border war, "For Peaceful Settlement of the Sino-Indian Boundary Question."

Table VIII: Attendance at
Four Newsreels, 1958-1959.
(In millions) ⁶⁷

"Under the Brilliant Illumination of the General Line"	80
"Quelling the Tibet Revolt"	60
"Heaven Can Be Conquered By Men"	30
"Symphony of The Shanghai Heroes"	0.7

⁶⁷ Communist China Digest, No. 20 (1960), p. 8.

⁶⁸ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 4, 1962, p. 9.

⁶⁹ SCMP, No. 2777 (1962), p. 16.

Without actually seeing these Communist newsreels and documentaries, it is difficult, indeed impossible, to evaluate their effectiveness. However, among audience criticisms, two points stand out: lack of realism and obsolescence. For example, one report said:

"A newsreel film group was sent to a village to film agricultural cooperatives there. The director of the group, however, did not follow the principle of realism. He proceeded from personal interest. According to the directive that he had, the cooperative was supposed to be surrounded by trees. But there was no tree in that village. So, he found a place 30 miles from the real scene and made that place into a cooperative in the film. In order to show many people in the cooperative as the directive prescribed, the director transported people from the nearby village to act as if there were many people in the cooperative..."⁷⁰

The obsolescence of many newsreels has given rise to a joke. A newsreel in Chinese is called "Hsin-Wen Chi-Lu Pien," which means literally a "film recording newly-heard things." Now, people on the mainland call it "Chiu-Wen Chi-Lu Pien," "a film recording past-heard things." A newsreel on an army athletic meet in August, 1952 had not reached the public even by August, 1953.⁷¹ The 1958-1959 feature-documentaries were not popular among audiences, who generally criticized its "dull story and low artistic quality."⁷²

Scientific-Educational Films

Setting up the Shanghai Scientific and Educational Film Studio in 1953 greatly bolstered Communist China's production of this type of film. This studio produced some 126 reels of scientific-educational films and supplied 10,000 copies of them to rural areas from 1953 to 1963.⁷³ It also translated over 260 such films from the Soviet Union and East European nations from 1953 to 1959.

⁷⁰ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 6, 1953, p. 19.

⁷¹ Tien-Ying Yu Kwan-Chung (Movies and Audiences), Canton, No. 3, 1957, p. 32.

⁷² Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying, op. cit., No. 22, 1959, p. 29.

⁷³ Kwang-Ming Jih-Pao (Kwang-Ming Daily), June 8, 1963.

Besides the Shanghai studio, there is also the Peking Scientific Film Studio. In 1962 a national conference on scientific-educational films was called. This conference reported that since 1949, more than 600 popular scientific films were made and 400 foreign scientific-educational films were translated into Chinese. Of the home-made films, 30 per cent were about agriculture and another 30 per cent were about agriculture and another 30 per cent were about industry.⁷⁴

In order to disseminate scientific-educational films, they were usually shown right before regular feature films. Aside from this, many "Scientific-Educational Film Weeks" were held in major cities of China. In 1963 two scientific-educational film weeks were held, one in Shanghai, the other was a nation-wide one. In Shanghai, 18 films were shown during the week and attendance was reported to have reached 300,000. The national scientific-educational film week was held in June in Peking and nine other cities. Half of the 20 films shown were about agriculture. The rest covered industry, science, health and medicine. Agricultural films dealt specifically with farming methods, prevention of plant pests and disease, use of insecticides and maintenance of tractors. The audience for this film week was reported to have been 2,000,000.⁷⁵

Since one of the most immediate functions assigned scientific-educational films is dissemination of scientific knowledge among the Chinese peasantry, criticisms of them are mostly directed at showings in the rural areas. According to Popular Cinema, readers' letters unanimously complained about the inefficiency and lack of planning in bringing scientific-educational films to the countryside.

⁷⁴SCMP, No. 2858 (1962), p. 14.

⁷⁵Ibid., No 3004 (1963), pp. 12-13.

A rural cadre in Hopei said:

"The distribution and exhibition units do not have any plan. Scientific-educational films often 'sleep' in the store room... Hopei is a hilly province. The work of soil and water preservation is very important. The area that needs soil and water preservation is large. A film like 'Preservation of Soil and Water' ought to be shown regularly in Hopei.⁷⁶ But the distribution unit has no such plan."

Rural cadres often requested more films to help eliminate superstition among the peasants. They requested films like "Speaking of Ghosts" or "Praying to God and Ghosts Does Not Work." In 1963 the government decided to start a mass campaign against superstition. Science popularization teams travelled around the countryside showing slides and films on basic facts of nature such as lightning and thunder.

With agriculture as Communist China's main economic problem, the role of scientific-educational films in rural development will undoubtedly be increasingly important in years to come.

Cartoons

Communist China has produced a limited number of animated cartoons every year. The contents vary from simple scientific knowledge to political propaganda. In 1956, a cartoon serial was released that satirized faults in industry in the fashion of the Soviet Krokodil. In 1957 this serial was put on mobile exhibit in major cities.⁷⁷

In the same year a special cartoon studio was set up in Shanghai. China's traditional art of scissor-cut paper figures was transformed into a new kind of cartoon film in 1959. The first cartoon film made from scissor-cut figures was the "Fishing Boy" which told of the Chinese people's anti-imperialist struggle on the eve of the Boxer Rebellion.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 12, 1956, p. 36.

⁷⁷ SCMP, No. 1437 (1956), p. 5

⁷⁸ Ibid., No. 1958 (1959), pp. 13-14.

In a public poll on the best films of 1962, "Uproar in Heaven" won the prize as the best animated cartoon. It was taken from a much-read Chinese novel, Journey to the West (Hsi Yu Chi), which told of a mythological Monkey King's adventures. "Uproar in Heaven" portrayed a very dramatic episode in which the Monkey harasses the sacred Palace of Heaven. The Communists have made the Monkey a proletarian and the Emperor of Heaven a feudal ruler. A million people in Shanghai alone were said to have seen this cartoon.⁷⁹

Newsreels, documentaries, scientific-educational films and cartoons constitute the most-impressive features of the Chinese Communist film industry. The Communists can be credited with pioneering in the production of these films in China. But the real essence of a film industry lies in the feature film, which is a composite form of art and literature requiring administrative and organizational sophistication. The true quality of a nation's film art and industry is reflected in its feature films. And herein is exposed the shortcomings of the Communist Chinese motion picture industry. Through the regime's 15 years' rule of mainland China, it has not exceeded the production record of pre-Communist China--101 feature films in 1934. Communist China produced 103 so-called feature films in 1958, but those were semi-documentaries that could not be equated with authentic feature films with plots acted by professional actors.

Feature Films

The production of various types of films is presented in Table IX, which clearly shows the slow growth of feature films. In 1951, the state-operated studios did not produce a single feature film. The one feature film in the table for 1951 was a product of a privately operated studio. By 1953 these studios had been completely wiped out.

⁷⁹SCMP, No. 2489 (1963), pp. 12-13.

Before the Great Leap Forward, 1956 was the peak year for feature film production. The record of 42 films was achieved after the government demanded that each province and each writers' organization supply a certain quota of film scripts. This required a sacrifice of quality to quantity. The same thing happened in 1958. Consider the following report, entitled "People Write Film Scenarios in Chekiang";⁸⁰

"Ninety-four film scenarios reflecting the atmosphere of the present epoch in the Great Leap Forward have been written by government functionaries, teachers, students, workers, peasants and soldiers in the coastal province of Chekiang since July (1958).

"Some of these amateur scenarios are being made into films: The Shanghai Tienma Film Studio has already completed two such feature films.

"...There was not a single professional scenario writer in Chekiang after liberation. But amateur writers began filling the breach, once the myth that only professionals could write was attacked. This followed their attendance at a conference on scenario writing, arranged in July jointly by the provincial cultural bureau and the provincial federation of literary and art circles..."

Another Leap Forward style film, "Huang Pao-mei," was said to have been written collectively and by a professional playwright, a film director, and members of the Communist Party Committee of the cotton mill where the story took place.⁸¹

After 1959, with the end of the Great Leap Forward, total production of feature films went down. The general sterility in Chinese art and literature since 1949, mismanagement and excessive administrative interference with feature film production were all responsible for the decline. Let us now discuss these in more detail.

⁸⁰ SCMP, No. 1915, (1958), p. 19.

⁸¹ Ibid., No. 1922, (1958), p. 4.

Table IX: Film Production in Communist China⁸²

<u>Year</u>	<u>Types of Film</u>				
	Feature	Newsreel & Documentary	Scientific- Educational	Cartoon	Foreign Dubbed
1951	1	36	3	- *	58
1952	5	38	12	-	59
1953	15	50	9	-	56
1954	26	65	15	4	80
1955	18	65	18	-	105
1956	42	79	37	-	72
1957	38	155	40	-	-
1958	103	255	154	54	151
1959	77	155	86	-	-
1960-					
1961	62	-	-	17	-

* "-" means no information.

Ideological Conformity and Feature Films

The sterility of literature in Communist China is the result of ideological control imposed by the Party. The starting point of this ideological centralization in art and literature was Mao Tse-tung's now well-known speech of May, 1942, at the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature. Mao gave a new definition and statement of purpose of literature and art:

⁸²The figures from 1951 to 1954 and 1956 are from Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 18, 1956; 1955 is from Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette), Peking, No. 24, 1955, p. 22; 1957 is from U.S.I.S. research report, 1960, op. cit.; 1958 is from Wen-Yi Pao, Nos. 19-20, 1959, p. 50; 1959 is from Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying, No. 6, 1960, p. 26; and 1960-1961 are from Current Background, JPRS, No. 690, 1962, p. 2, and SCMP, No. 2730, p. 19.

"Quite true, there exist art and literature intended for the exploiters and oppressors. The art and literature for the landlord class are feudal art and literature. Such are the art and literature of the ruling classes of China's feudal epoch. Even today such art and literature still retain a considerable influence in China. The art and literature for the bourgeoisie are bourgeois art and literature... The art and literature for imperialism... is called collaborationist art and literature. So far as we are concerned, art and literature are not intended for any of the above-mentioned persons, but for the people...

"Who, then, are the broad masses of the people? The broadest masses of the people who constitute more than 90 per cent of the total population are the workers, peasants, soldiers and the urban petty bourgeoisie. So our art and literature are first of all for the workers who form the class which leads the revolution. Secondly, they are for the peasants who form the most numerous and steadfast allies in the revolution. Thirdly, they are for the armed workers and peasants, i.e. the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies and other people's armed forces, which are the main forces of the revolutionary war. Fourthly, they are for the working masses of the urban petty bourgeoisie together with its intelligentsia, who are our allies in the revolution and are capable of lasting cooperation with us."⁸³

In order to "serve the broad masses of the people,"

Mao prescribed:

"All revolutionary artists and writers of China, all artists and writers of high promise, must, for long periods of time, unreservedly and whole-heartedly go into the midst of the masses, the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers; they must go into fiery struggles, go to the only, the broadest, the richest source to observe,

⁸³ Mao Tse-tung Hsun Chi (Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung), Peking, Jen-Min Chu-Pan She (People's Publishing House), Vol. 3, 1961, pp. 857-858.

learn, study and analyze all men, all classes, all kinds of people, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle and all raw material of art and literature,⁸⁴ before they can proceed to creation."

What happened after this forum and the subsequent "thought reforms" of the Communist writers in Yen-an was what is happening in today's mainland China--barrenness in creative work. In the summer of 1944, a group of reporters from Chungking visited Yen-an. A representative of the independent Hsin-Min Pao (New Citizen Daily) commented on the literary scene:

"In fact, there are quite a number of famous writers residing in Yen-an but their production does not seem to be plentiful. According to their own explanation, they are now engaged in 'study.' Therefore we cannot at this moment estimate the success of this literary policy. We should be fair and wait and see. We should not judge until we have seen the results of their 'study.'" ⁸⁵

What, then, were the results of their "study"?

Those who had long been practicing Mao's prescription to "go into the midst of the masses" came back with realistic stories that shocked the Party. The two most obvious cases were the well-known left-wing woman writer Ting Ling and a young writer named Wang Shih-wei. In her many articles and novels, Ting Ling wrote about class discrimination in Yen-an and prejudice against women among Communist cadres. In 1942 Ting Ling wrote "Thoughts on March 8" in celebration of Women's Day; this work defied the Party's instructions to write only of "the establishment of the international women's anti-fascist united front, the promotion of unity in China, the active part that women should play in revolu-

⁸⁴ Mao Tse-tung Hsun Chi (Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung), Peking, Jen-Min Chu-Pan She (People's Publishing House), Vol 3, 1961, pp. 862-863.

⁸⁵ Quoted in T.A. Hsia's "Twenty Years after the Yen-an Forum," The China Quarterly, January-March, 1963, p. 236.

tion." Instead she wrote about the miserable conditions of women in Yen-an. She said: "In the old society, when a girl got into trouble in a love affair she had at least the sympathy of some people, but in the new society she is usually told that she deserves the penalty."⁸⁶

Wang Shih-wei, who was then on the staff of the Communist Central Academy, wrote a series called "The White Wild Lily." In it, he mentioned that there were three kinds of kitchens in Yen-an: one each for the common mess, for the cadres of middle rank and for the high officials. Because of this, Wang was expelled from the Party and then disappeared.⁸⁷ As for Ting Ling, her popularity among the Chinese in general kept her in a high Communist position until 1956. Denounced as an anti-Party rightist, she was stripped of her positions in the government, the Party, and the literary organizations. As a noted authority on contemporary Chinese literature, T.A. Hsia commented:

"Unlike the proletarian writers of the 1920's, who had probably more daydreams than experience, Chinese writers by 1952 had all studied some aspects of life. Among those who showed marks of 'bourgeois corrosion,' there were Ting Ling and others who had actually lived among the masses for quite a number of years. Their trouble was perhaps that they had too much experience to discover what the Communists call 'the typical' and the 'pattern of life.'" ⁸⁸

Having witnessed the fate of Ting Ling and scores of others, most of the Chinese writers apparently have decided to stay on the safe side--better to be a "left dogmatist" than an "anti-Party rightist." The result is what the Communist authorities call the worst problem in contemporary art and literature, "formularization and conceptualization."

⁸⁶Quoted in Houn, op. cit., p. 136.

⁸⁷Anon., "I Accuse, I Protest," in Dennis J. Doolin (translator), Communist China: The Politics of Student Opposition, Stanford, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1964, pp. 63-64.

⁸⁸T.A. Hsia, op. cit., p. 249.

To explain these two Communist terms, we quote an editorial in the People's Daily:

"Secondly, there is a tendency which seems to be in opposition to the above-mentioned (bourgeois) tendency but which actually represents also a loss of contact with the masses and with life. It is the tendency towards formularization and conceptualization in literary and art creation. This tendency comes from a Philistine understanding of the political mission of literature and art. The works with this tendency do not have a content except for a medley of slogans and concepts. There is no life in them: the characters in them have neither flesh and blood nor any distinction. What is accomplished is merely a crude mixture of some superficial political concepts with a story according to a formula..."⁸⁹

Then the editorial repeated the same prescription given by Mao in the Yen-an Forum--"go into the midst of the masses." Subsequently, the writers were sent to the masses. But when they came back, they did not want to make the mistakes that Ting Ling and Wang Shih-wei had made. They came back with "formularization and conceptualization" and, if possible, they would not write.

It is this barren land of art and literature that supplies scripts for the feature films. Before long, the Communist Party was indeed criticizing the films for "formularization and conceptualization." Chen Huang-mei, deputy director of the Film Administrative Bureau, wrote in 1954:

"The Party points out that the tendency toward formularization and conceptualization exists in our film art. Many films merely explain a political concept. They lack realistic and concrete descriptions of real-life struggles. Characters in these films do not have distinctive identities. The films do not use a characteristic way of educating people's thinking through socialism.

⁸⁹ Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), May 23, 1952. The translation is from T.A. Hsia, op. cit., pp. 248-249.

Therefore, many films have no striking characterization and the films do not have profound convincing power. This tendency exists even among some fine films.⁹⁰

Of course, it is the Party that is the ultimate cause of "formularization and conceptualization." And it is the Party that has made it impossible to produce good feature films. To see why this is so, we must begin with the suppression of the film, "Wu Hsun the Beggar," in 1950.

Wu Hsun was born of a poor family in Shantung in 1839. When he was only five, his father died, leaving seven children of whom Wu Hsun was the youngest. The family had no means of making a living but begging. Wu Hsun tried to enter a village school at the age of seven but was turned away because of his family's low social status. Wu Hsun then made up his mind to start his own school someday. He became a beggar himself and he begged in order to found a school. Saving every cent he got, Wu Hsun finally became a money-lender. By 1888, he had saved enough money to start his first school. In time more schools were opened by him. Wu Hsun became famous for his interest in education. The Manchu government bestowed posthumous honors and titles on him. When China was under the Nationalist government, the story of Wu Hsun was used in primary school text books as an exemplary figure.

In 1947, before the Communist take-over, a Chinese film maker started to shoot the picture, "Wu Hsun the Beggar." It was not completed until 1950. Nobody suspected that this film would later become a target of sharp Party criticism, since as late as December 5, 1949, an article appeared in the Kwang-Ming Jih-Pao (Kwang Ming Daily) exalting the "greatness of Wu Hsun." The journal, Popular Cinema, even listed this film as one of the ten best pictures of 1950.

⁹⁰Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 18, 1954, p. 9.

Then, events took a sharp turn and we quote Theodore Chen at length:

"In April and May, 1959, a couple of articles appeared in the Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette) questioning the value of the story of Wu Hsun and challenging the current evaluation of the film. On May 16, 1951, the Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily) reprinted one of the articles with an editor's note that the article should encourage more discussion of the film. Four days later came the big blow. On May 20, 1951, the authoritative...Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily) published an editorial condemning the current acclamation of the film as evidence of the ideological confusion of intellectuals and of the deep infiltration of reactionary bourgeois ideologies even among the Party members. It condemned Wu Hsun for his failure to challenge the culture and economic structure of feudal society and for courting the favor of the feudal ruling class. Instead of being a praiseworthy educator, Wu Hsun became a 'propagator of feudal culture.' The authors who had reviewed favorably the film were reprimanded for paying tribute to a historical figure who, instead of attempting to overthrow the reactionary ruling class by violent struggle, had surrendered to it in abject shame. To tolerate such 'shameful deeds' as those of Wu Hsun, said the editorial, 'was to condone 'open slander' of the Chinese people.'

"On the same day, Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily) issued a call to all Communists to join in criticism of the film and the story of Wu Hsun, and 'to participate voluntarily in this ideological struggle' against the infiltration of 'reactionary bourgeois ways of thinking.' Party members were asked to 'rise and fight.' Realizing the serious nature of the approaching storm, the producers of the picture hastened to withdraw it from circulation. The studio publicized this decision in newspaper announcements and expressed regret for the ideological mistakes of the picture due to 'lack of political study on the part of our staff'; it promised that its staff would now carry out a thorough 'self-examination.' Subsequently the studio was reorganized into a state concern 'at the request of the owners.'

"Sun Yu, the director of the film, found it wise to publish a confession of his errors: he concurred with the stand of Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily) that the picture was 'harmful

to the people'; he pleaded ignorance and pledged a thorough examination of his work with the hope that he might henceforth be able to work 'correctly.'"⁹¹

But the Party did not stop with that. This film marked the initiation of the first campaign of "thought reform" among Chinese intellectuals on the mainland. The campaign was carried on through the end of 1951.

The Chinese writers and particularly the film artists learned a bitter lesson from this episode. Before the end of 1951 there was another suppression of a film, by which the Party reinforced the lesson of Wu Hsun. This was the film, "Between Us, Husband and Wife."

The writer of this film script was Hsiao Yea-mu, a veteran Communist since 1939. The story was about a "revolutionary couple" who moved to a city with the victorious Red Army. Adjustment to the new urban life posed a problem for the husband and the wife, and a quarrel developed. Finally the wife won the "struggle" and they had a happy reunion. Hsiao made the wife of proletariat-peasant background and the husband of intellectual-bourgeois background. His idea was to extol the "firm proletarian stand" of the wife. Full of human interest episodes of love, marriage, quarrel and reunion, this film won wide popularity. Comic books based on the story were published on a large scale. The film was shown in 1950 without any opposition from the Party. Yet in late 1951, the Party turned against the film. It was called "a representative of petit bourgeois thought" because the wife was portrayed as an "ignorant virago" yet the husband was depicted as "a man of wisdom and talent." This, the Party said, was tantamount to saying that "all our old cadres are ridiculous and stupid."⁹² The film was suppressed and banned.

⁹¹Theodore H.E. Chen, Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals, Hong Kong University Press, 1960, pp. 39-40.

⁹²San-Nien Fei-Chin Chun-Su (Three Years' of Bandit's State), Taipei, Investigation Bureau of the Ministry of Interior, 1953, pp. 331-332.

This was 1951, the year that not a single feature film was produced by the state-operated studios. The writers and other film workers were then sent down to "go into the midst of the masses" in factories and villages. The consequences which followed were almost the same as in the post-Yenan Forum period. Ting Ling wrote of that period:

"Then we did not have the opportunity to write; all of us were swallowed up in the strong tides of reform and study. This lasted until the New Year of 1944 when the Party mobilized us to write yang-ko plays..."⁹³

The writers of post-1951 China were also swallowed up in the constant "strong tides of reform and study." These post-1951 writers too had no opportunity to write freely and they would write only when the Party mobilized them. The Party, indeed, tried to mobilize them several times. We shall review these efforts with film workers.

In 1953 the National Conference of Film and Art Workers was held in Peking under the joint sponsorship of the Communist Party and the Ministry of Culture. Announced as an effort to improve the film industry, the conference paid lip service to the policy, "avoid rude criticism," but no deviation from Mao's prescription was allowed. Although from 1954 to 1957 several conferences were called by the government and the Party to discuss the problems of low quality and quantity of feature films, no marked improvement followed. Writing in 1956, Chen Huan-mei criticized the formulas used in feature films:

"When the working class is engaging in creative work, there should be characterization of the contradiction between progressive and backward thinking. But our films about workers and peasants tell only of the process of technological reform and neglect positive characterization of psychic struggles. The result is that they have more or less uniform plots. A simple formula goes like this: The advanced thinking workers

⁹³Quoted in T.A. Hsia, op. cit., p. 236

want to utilize their potential ability to create and invent new things but they are hindered by bureaucratism; the Party then comes to the support of the workers and they finally succeed after numerous experiments and failures. The scripts reflecting village life are far behind the high speed of socialist construction in the villages. For two years, there have been scripts on the struggles and contradictions in the process of rural socialist construction. These films also have a formula. It goes like this: contradiction between the old and young generations and then, almost invariably, some natural calamity finally drives the peasants to join the farm cooperatives..."⁹⁴

The period of 1956-1957 was the era of the so-called "hundred flowers" campaign when free speech and criticism against the government were supposed to be allowed. In film circles, criticism against the Party was as blunt as that in other fields. For example, a commentator of Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette) attributed "formularization and conceptualization" to the very idea of "art and literature for workers, peasants and soldiers."⁹⁵ This was echoed by all other critics at this period. After the Party abruptly concluded the "hundred flowers" campaign the critics were branded as "rightists" and were swallowed up in "reform and study."

Meanwhile, leaders in Peking had a ready explanation for the low quality of the Chinese feature film: The low quality was due to lack rather than overdoses of ideological remolding of the film artist. Thus, Hsia Yen, Vice Minister of Culture, spoke about the difficulties in the film industry:

"Due to the fact that certain Party cadres in the film circle have not yet completely changed their world outlook and genuinely turned from one class to another, in both daily work and creative thinking, they can not determinedly implement the Party's class policy and class line and thus cannot satisfactorily follow

⁹⁴ Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette), Peking, No. 5-6, 1956, p. 40.

⁹⁵ Ibid., No. 23, 1956, p. 3.

Chairman Mao's principle of letting literature and art serve the workers, the peasants and soldiers."⁹⁶

In 1961, a National Conference on the Production of Feature Films was called in Peking. Chou En-lai presided at the meeting which also included such "bigwigs" as Chou Yang, Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party and the inevitable Hsia Yen. The meeting produced some significant remarks: for the first time the term "an entertaining story" was used in reference to feature films. Nevertheless, the meeting concluded with Mao's cure-all prescription--"go into the midst of the masses"--and called for "elevation of the ideological and artistic level of the working personnel."⁹⁷

At best, the Communist literary leaders could quote their Chairman Mao, who had also said in the 1942 Yanan Forum:

"What we demand is unity of politics and art, of content and form, and of revolutionary political content and the highest possible degree of effectiveness in artistic form. Works of art, however politically progressive, are powerless if they lack artistic quality."⁹⁸

It is easier to produce jargon and issue decrees than to implement them. As T.A. Hsia says, "to present life as the writer understands it is hard enough; but to present life as the Communist Party orders it to be is not so easy ...unless the writer can harden himself, to 'treat life violently and to keep his eyes shut.'"⁹⁹

The Search for a Hero

Beginning in the 1960's Chinese film directors and script writers tried to find a way out of their dilemma by dealing more with two types of subject: the historical and

⁹⁶Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), February 2, 1960.

⁹⁷SCMP, No. 2546 (1961), p. 18.

⁹⁸Mao Tse-tung, op. cit.

⁹⁹T.A. Hsia, op. cit., p. 249.

the military. They began to dig out historical events that the Communist Party regarded as healthy. In 1963, for instance, the film, "Naval Battle of 1894," was completed; it recorded events from the first Sino-Japanese War when the Manchu dynasty ruled China. The Manchu navy was wiped out in that battle. The film focussed on one Chinese captain who fought a lone heroic struggle with the Japanese navy. This captain was made a national hero.

However, history is not always a safe for script writers to handle since they are not the judges of whether an old legend is "healthy." The military subject is relatively easy to handle. This is true not only because the Party demands military discipline of the civilian population but also because there are abundant realistic stories to be found in the Party's long history of insurgence. These can be transformed into films with little revision. Since 1960 the number of war films has risen.

From 1961 to 1963 the army studio, "Pa I," and others produced films like "Red Sun" (about the civil war in 1947), "Keep the Red Flag Flying" (Communist-Party-directed subversion in 1930), "Break Through at Wukiang" (an episode of the 1934-1935 Long March), "Yenan Guerrillas" (guerrilla war in 1947-1948), "Li Tung-mei" (a woman commissar in the Red Army), "Prelude to the Eastward March," "The Angry Wave," etc.

The magnitude of the increase of films on war and subversion in the civil war period can be illustrated simply. Ten issues of the Popular Cinema, the leading cinema journal in Communist China, have been selected, five in 1955 and five in 1962. Their months of publication are identical. In the 1955 issues, eight feature films are counted; one of them is on war. In 1962, 16 feature films are counted; seven of them are on war.

The military films have a formula too. We present two eye-witness accounts of the war pictures in Communist China.

The first account is by a student from Ghana, who studied

medicine in Peking from November, 1960 to April, 1962. This is what he says about films:

"Throughout our life in China there was a constant dearth of normal diversion and entertainment. Film shows were an important item of recreation during the earlier part of our sojourn. The films were usually either about their revolution or about the Korean War. The revolutionary films have an exasperating habit of ending on the same theme: while a gallant revolutionary hero lies wounded and dying, surrounded by anxious comrades, a young zealot comes running across the screen waving a voluminous red flag signifying the victory of the revolution. In China I never once saw a science-fiction film or any film that stirred your imagination."¹⁰⁰

The second account is by a Chinese peasant who fled to Hong Kong in 1959. We quote part of his response to an interview:

Question (Q):

What kind of entertainment did you have in the commune? Did you have movies?

Answer (A):

Yes, we did. There were screenings once or twice a month, but we were asked to pay for them.

Q: What kind of films were shown?

A: Battle films and feature story films.

Q: What were they about?

A: The feature story films were of the ancient "Story of the Seven Fairy Sisters" type; the battle films were like, "Island..."

Q: Were they war pictures?

A: Yes, all about battles.

Q: Were the stories about the Communists?

A: Some about the Communists and some about the Nationalists.

Q: How did they describe the Nationalists?

A: In the films shown, the Communists were always winning the battles, and the

¹⁰⁰ Emmanuel John Hevi, "An African Student in Red China," Harper's Magazine, January, 1964, pp. 63-71.

Nationalists were always defeated. The Communists were described as being very brave, and the Nationalists were in a helplessly defensive position. After seeing the pictures, someone said, 'I really don't know whether it was true or not. The pictures describe all Communists as good people. The others are not human beings?'

Q: They didn't like to see the films?

A: Many people were unwilling to see the pictures. They were not to their liking. In their hearts, they hoped the Nationalists would prove to be the winning side, but the pictures always showed victory for the Communists.¹⁰¹

What, then, is the state of rural-oriented films? The answer is provided by a Communist writer in 1963: "As things stand at present, not only is the quality of rural films still below the desired standard, but their number is still too small, far short of the demand of our country's several hundred million peasant cinema-goers..."¹⁰² The few films with rural themes inevitably follow a formula. A vivid description is provided by a former American soldier who chose to live in Communist China after the Korean War. Scott Leonard Rush finally left China in September, 1963. We quote a part of the magazine True's interview with Mr. Rush:

TRUE: What would you do with your off time, your spare time?

RUSH: Not a hell of a lot. For 30 or 40 cents (American) I could get a Western meal and a beer at a White Russian restaurant in Hankow. Sometimes it was cheaper to eat there than to eat Chinese food at the factory mess hall. And then once in awhile I'd go to a movie. But they were always the same thing--"Girl Meets Tractor."

¹⁰¹ From unclassified Research Reports, 1960, U.S.I.S. Hong Kong Bureau, 1961, pp. 162-163.

¹⁰² SCMM, No. 346 (1963), pp. 20-23.

TRUE: 'Girl Meets Tractor?'

RUSH: Yes, They go like this: A girl in the country gets tired of country life and goes to the city to find a husband. But in the city she discovers that country life is really best after all, so she goes back, joins a farm commune and starts working like hell to produce food for China and lives happily ever after. They're real short on movies in China. Sometimes the same feature would be playing at two or three theaters in Wuhan--using the same film. After one reel was finished, a guy would rush it to the second theater on a bicycle.¹⁰³

So far, we have reviewed the ideological conformity of films in Communist China and the film artist's dilemma. In order to achieve ideological conformity, the Party has built a bureaucratic machine for censorship. We now turn to this aspect of the Chinese film industry.

Censorship and Party Control in Action

The 1956 and 1957 "hundred flowers" campaign provided a rare opportunity to learn about the Party's methods of control of film. We present the various control actions in the form of charges that the film artists directed at the Party during this period of "hundred flowers."

1. Too much interference from the Party cadres.

A commentary entitled "Why are there so few good domestic films?" says:

"The film workers say that many factors contribute to the low quality of our films. But the main one is the transfer of leadership of film enterprises from artistic to political units. The film workers' reaction is that the leading administrative cadres have often interfered inappropriately... For example, once a script-writer wanted to write a love story about a famous prostitute, Li Yua, in the Tang Dynasty to expose the contradiction in the minds of those feudal persons. But the administrative leading cadres said that

¹⁰³"My Ten Years in Red China: A G.I. Defector Tells Why," True, The Man's Magazine, June, 1964, p. 89.

to use a prostitute as a typical historical character was not correct. Hence, this script was dropped. Persons engaged in creative works on films have been subject to many rules and regulations. Administrative cadres frequently made inflexible rules without paying attention to their effect on the quality of the film. In one scene of the film, "Garden of Youth," there was a Pekinese dog in a character's home. When a sample of this film was submitted to the administrative unit for approval, the cadre there said that there should not be any dog in the film because keeping a dog at one's home is a 'bourgeois way of living.'¹⁰⁴

Similar cases were cited by many critics. For example, the film "The Driver Hero" originally ended with a scene showing the car moving up the hill. But the Party cadre did not like this. He changed the concluding scene to the following: "The bureau chief of the transportation unit came out, summed up the technological reform as presented in the story and then pointed to a series of statistics showing the over-fulfillment of the plan, fini."¹⁰⁵ "In some film units, the Party commissars were reported to have gone so far as to prescribe even the manner of saying 'Thank You' on the screen."¹⁰⁶

2. Too little authority left for the director.

According to veteran movie director Chen Li-ting, whenever a script writer or a director showed any initiative in his work he was likely to be accused of "attempting to put the administrative leaders in a passive role."¹⁰⁷ When the film workers asked in 1956 for more authority, they received this rebuff from Wang Lan-hsi, director of the Film Administrative Bureau:

¹⁰⁴ Kwang-Ming Jih-Pao (Kwang Ming Daily), December 14, 1956.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Houn, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

"When the rightists declare that the Party does not understand the motion picture business, it is a 'layman,' is 'interfering with the industry's administration,' and that the 'studio must be run by art workers' and led by 'experts,' their intention is to negate Party leadership and to wrest leadership from the Party..."¹⁰⁸

3. Discrimination against non-Party personnel and waste of manpower.

"Party members and so-called progressive elements were said to be paid better, promoted faster, and given more important roles to play in films than non-Party personnel, who were either left idle or assigned to play insignificant parts, thus causing low morale among the people in the film industry."¹⁰⁹

In the Changchun Film Studio, the so-called cradle of "people's cinema" in Communist China, 70 per cent of its 144 professional actors and actresses were given no work for months or years. Nevertheless, the directors of the studio, for unexplained reasons, often employed persons outside the studio's staff. "Actors and actresses of the Liaoning People's Art Group, the Resist-the-Enemy Drama Corps and the Literary Group of the People's Liberation Army's General Political Department had monopolized all the roles in the feature films supposedly produced by the Changchun Film Studio."¹¹⁰

4. Negligence of professional training and facilities.

The big Changchun studio is described as having "six camera sheds but not a single rehearsing room. If anyone wants to rehearse his role, he has to borrow the recording room...or go to practice in the hallway of the administrative building..."¹¹¹ Eric Chou, a veteran Chinese journalist and one-time Communist sympathizer, wrote of his trip to the Changchun Studio: "The Changchun Studio, though claimed

¹⁰⁸ SCMM, No. 123, 1958, pp. 24-36.

¹⁰⁹ Houn, op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette), No. 11, 1957, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

by the Communists to be the cradle of their film industry, failed to impress me. Its buildings looked oldish and badly in need of repair, while its equipment was inadequate even by Hong Kong standards..."¹¹²

5. Red Tape.

"The censorship of film scripts is too complicated. A script used to go through five or six procedures and even now it has to go through four or five procedures. The censors frequently make demands according to their personal prejudices. Hence, the writers of scripts do not know how to satisfy them, and they usually revise the scripts to such a degree that the original writer can no longer recognize it."¹¹³

Normally the Film Administration Bureau censors all the films but in cases of long feature films, the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party has the final say.

6. Lack of genuine film reviews and audience response.

Where the movie industry is operated by private owners, a minimum quality is assured by competition. The popularity of films is reflected at the box-office. The film industry is a state enterprise in Communist China and the box-office is not necessarily an indicator of film popularity, for audiences are often organized to view films.

According to the Communists' own reports, during the past few years whenever the local Party organization relaxed their efforts to urge people to attend, cinemas usually found that 70 to 90 per cent of their seats were unoccupied. For example, a report said: "In Shanghai, only 9 per cent of the seats were occupied for the film, "A Proposal," 20 per cent for the film, "The Land," 26 per cent for "Spring Winds Blow on the Lo-Min River" and "Orange Red Along the Ming River."¹¹⁴ According to

¹¹²Eric Chou, A Man Must Choose, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963, pp. 243-244.

¹¹³Kwang-Ming Jih-Pao (Kwang Ming Daily), December 14, 1956.

¹¹⁴Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette), Peking, No. 23, 1956.

the Kwang-Ming Jih-Pao, in Peking there were 100 domestically produced films from 1953 to 1956, of which 70 per cent lost money; some films earned only 10 per cent of the production cost. The documentary, The Lucky Children," did not even meet its advertising costs.¹¹⁵

When some film workers cited these facts during the "A Hundred Flowers Bloom Together" campaign, Wang Lan-hsi replied:

"It is to be admitted that we are not at all good at handling money business, nor are we money-making experts... In 1957 the nation's total income from film distribution is estimated at 58 million yuan, with every possibility of the target being surpassed..."

"However, what is more important is not whether we make money or lose money but whether we have for the past several years served the workers, peasants and soldiers. The motion picture industry is an important cultural enterprise; we must go at it without giving any thought to its financial aspect. Since ours is socialist in nature, it must primarily serve the people. If our motion picture has served its purpose, it would be justifiable even if it loses money and has to be subsidized by the government."¹¹⁶

Despite Wang's statement, the Film Administrative Bureau demanded that all cinemas as well as mobile projection teams make profits. This caused many teams to concentrate only in urban areas, so as to fulfill the profit-quota. Showing films to poor rural regions is not a lucrative task.¹¹⁷

Since the Party and the Party only is the judge of "good" or "bad" films, the Communist authorities often gave awards to the films which the public disliked the most.¹¹⁸ However, in 1957 the Party changed its tactics. Public polls were taken to select the best films of the preceding year. The Party moved cautiously from small polls to lar-

¹¹⁵Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette), Peking, No. 23, 1956.

¹¹⁶SCMM, No. 123 (1958), pp. 24-36.

¹¹⁷SCMP, No. 2826 (1962), pp. 10-11.

¹¹⁸Houn, op. cit.

ger polls, from residents of Peking, to readers of Popular Cinema and then finally in 1964 to all the people in the nation.

Public Opinion Polls

The first poll on films was held in 1957 to select the best films of 1956. The poll, sponsored by the Peking Jih Pao (Peking Daily) and the Central People's Broadcasting Station, was restricted to residents of Peking. The people were asked to choose the five best films and the five best actors in the films shown in 1956. It was reported that 20,000 people turned in their votes, which was about one out of every 97 adults in the city. A war picture, "Tung Tsun-jui," was selected as best film.

"Tung Tsun-jui" was the name of the hero of the picture. While still in his early teens, Tung wanted to join the Red Army during the Second World War. He was rejected but he stayed with a local Party cadre who led Tung's village in fighting the Japanese invaders. In a skirmish with the enemy, the cadre was fatally wounded. Before he died, the cadre asked Tung to find the commander of the Red Army to give him the cadre's Party membership fee. Tung found the commander and was admitted to the army. Once, in a battle, Tung rescued a neighboring company in danger without his commander's order. The commander wanted to court-martial him but the political commissar of the unit awarded him a medal. The picture ended with a scene in the civil war. Tung, upon hearing the bugle for charge, jumped up, threw a grenade at the Kuomintang troops and shouted: "For new China, march forward!" This was echoed by all the soldiers repeating, "For new China, march forward!"

In 1962, the film journal, Popular Cinema, conducted a poll among its readers to select the best films, actors, scenarios, directors, cameramen, music and designs in films shown in the period of 1960-1961. The poll was collected by mail. A coupon was attached to issues of the journal during the mailing period. The collection of votes lasted

for three months and 120,000 votes were received, an average of one vote from every 2.8 readers of the journal. "Returns came from every province and profession, from state farms and drilling teams in Sinkiang, from front-line soldiers in Fukien, from school teachers on the Tibetan Plateau, from mountainous areas where films had never been shown before 1958 and from Chinese students and residents abroad in over ten countries. Students accounted for one-third of the total votes."¹¹⁹

One disturbing point in the Communist report on this poll was the occurrence of the so-called group votes. "In some cases a whole group of people sent one return giving their collective choice in each category...The Schichingshan Iron and Steel Plant, where interest ran high, sent one thousand votes from twenty thousand workers and their families."¹²⁰ It seems that some of the votes were results of organizational activities and inevitably reflected the will of the Party cadre who inevitably summed up group discussions.

According to the Popular Cinema poll, the best film for 1960-1961 turned out to be another military film, "Red Detachment of Women," which was about the first contingent of women soldiers organized in the late 1920's on Hainan Island off the coast of Kwantung. The prize-awarding ceremony for the film was carried out with great fanfare. The Central Television Station in Peking telecast the whole proceeding on April 28, 1962.

The third poll was taken by the same journal in 1963 to elect the best films of 1962. The journal received 180,000 votes from its readers, an average of one vote from every 1.8 readers. The film, "Li Shuang-shuang," was elected as the best film. Again, there were groups who cast

¹¹⁹ SCMP, No. 2730 (1962), pp. 19-20.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

collective votes after discussion.¹²¹

Nothing could be more coincidental than the fact that this film was elected in a year when the Party was calling for "everything for agriculture." Li Shuang-shuang was the name of the heroine of the picture. The film was based on a short story with the same title by writer Li Chun.

Li Shuang-shuang was the wife of Sung Hsi-wang, a member of a production team in a village. During the 1958 Leap Forward, Li asked the Party secretary in the village to establish a communal mess hall, so she could join the men to engage in construction work. This request was promoted through the big-character-poster (Ta-tze pao). Her proposal was accepted and a mess hall was set up. The film then revolved around the mess hall. Sung Hsi-wang, the husband, did not like this idea and resented his wife's increasing participation in public life. Li, on the other hand, was for everything that the Party was for--the mess hall, the nursery, the spare-time literacy class, etc. When Sung found a villager hiding a private wooden wheel, used for irrigation purposes, Li Shuang-shuang immediately went to inform the Party secretary which Sung did not want her to do. The story concludes with Sung being "converted" by Li and resolutely "let politics take command" of everything.

"Li Shuang-shuang" was acclaimed as the new peasant woman in new China. The actress, Chang Jui-fang, herself was portrayed as a daughter of the Communist revolution. "Her mother and other members of her family took part in revolutionary work. She has long been a Communist Party member. She started her stage experience as an amateur when she was a 15-year-old middle school pupil. When the War of Resistance against Japanese aggression broke out in 1937, she performed plays against imperialist aggression on Peking streets... Later she joined a theatrical troupe,

¹²¹ SCMP, No. 2988 (1963), p. 17.

led by the Chinese Communist Party, to perform patriotic plays among army units and in rural areas...Chang Jui-fang is fond of reading books, from the theory of Marxism-Leninism to novels..."¹²²

Chang Jui-fang and the writer Li Chun were also models for Maoist artists in following the prescription, "go into the midst of the masses." Thus, "Chang Jui-fang went with the director and other members of the cast to live for a period in the villages in Honan Province on which the film is based, working and chatting in close touch with the peasants. During the past decade she has kept in close touch with the countryside, her stay in different villages giving her a profound insight into the peasants' thoughts and feelings."¹²³ Li Chun and his family, as one report says, "have been settled in a village in Honan province for nearly nine years...Critics are of the opinion that the success of the film is inseparable from his long years among the peasants..."¹²⁴

The fourth poll was in process from March to May, 1964, to elect the best films, etc., shown in 1963. This poll was sponsored by the China Cinema Workers' Association and the audience was not limited to readers of Popular Cinema. The number of awards in each category was increased from one to three. The coupons were distributed by the Film Distribution Company's local branch offices, the General Political Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and also appeared on detachable forms in the Popular Cinema. The poll was closed on May 10, 1964. The results are as yet unknown.¹²⁵

In the meantime, the Party also makes awards without polls. On January 17, 1964, ten newsreels and documentaries of 1963 were given citations by the Ministry of Culture.

¹²² SCMP, No. 2987 (1963), pp. 16-17.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ SCMP, No. 2988 (1963), p. 17.

¹²⁵ Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), February 2, 1964.

Significantly, four of the ten films dealt with Peking's foreign relations. They were: "American Negroes" Struggles," "China-Cambodia Friendship Blossoms," "Chairman Liu Shao-chi Visits Korea," and "Resolute Algeria."¹²⁶

Whether or how much the polls represented genuine popular responses is a very moot question. Evidence suggests that the polls were another version of mobilized public opinion. First, many votes were cast by groups who made their choice after discussion.¹²⁷ It was required that when a group cast one vote collectively, all the participants sign their names to the ballots. Furthermore, in the award-giving ceremonies, representatives of audiences in people's communes, army units, factories and schools all came to greet the actors and actresses. These audiences were organized apparently.¹²⁸ Organized letter-writing or vote-mailing is not inconceivable. Western politicians often do this. In Communist China where almost everyone is a member of a certain organization, mobilizing and manipulating something like mailing votes should be relatively easy to carry out.

Second, the Communist reports uniformly described how popular the film, "Li Shuang-shuang," was with the peasants. "The name of Li Shuang-shuang is now very popular in the Chinese countryside as a synonym for selflessness and being concerned for collective interests. It is common to hear peasants call a commune member with these qualities, 'the Li-Shuang-shuang of our village.'"¹²⁹ It will surprise no one if rural Party cadres use "Li Shuang-shuang" to promote the cause of communes. But it is difficult to believe that Chinese peasants really like Li Shuang-shuang. If indeed all the Communists' reports were true, then there

¹²⁶ Peking Review, January 31, 1964.

¹²⁷ See SCMP, No. 2987 (1963), p. 15; No. 2988 (1963), p. 17; and Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), May 30, 1963.

¹²⁸ Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), May 30, 1963.

¹²⁹ SCMP, No. 2988 (1963), p. 17.

would have been no need for the government to retreat from the commune movement as it did after 1960. Even Anna Louise Strong, in her recent article on the people's communes (June 12, 1964 from China) which she called a success, writes: "Only the public dining-rooms which in 1958 swept the rural areas have been greatly diminished, for the family kitchens were found to be needed..."¹³⁰

There is still another phenomenon in Communist China's film industry that lends support to our suspicion of the so-called "public polls" on films. This is the Party-line film reviewers. There are no genuine film reviews in China today. To be sure professional film reviewers exist but their duty is to praise not to evaluate. In August, 1961, Popular Cinema published a rare letter to the editor which assailed these reviewers:

"What deserves special mention is that some of these not very artistic films have not been given due discussion or criticism. On the contrary, judging from certain related reviews and comments, they have been acclaimed as 'deeply moving,' 'forceful,' and even 'full of revolutionary fervor' and 'permeated with rich revolutionary romanticism,' etc. Obviously such film reviews have hit wide off the mark. Not only is this a demonstration of irresponsibility toward films but also it amounts to an underestimation of the merits of a number of excellent films which ideologically and artistically have reached definite levels..."¹³¹

In sum, then, with the absence of voluntary audience response and genuine film reviews and under the existing oppressive ideological control, it is difficult to see how a large number of films with good quality in Communist China can be produced.

¹³⁰ Peking Review, June 12, 1964.

¹³¹ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), August, 1961. Translation is from SCMM, No. 285 (1961), p. 31.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Audience

Communist China's movie audience totalled 5,400,000,000 in 1960, of which over 60 per cent were reported to be peasants.¹³² Then the peasant audience numbered 3,240,000,000 in 1960. If we approximate China's population in 1960 as 700 million,¹³³ and among them 70 per cent were over 15-years-old and hence could be called "adults,"¹³⁴ then the adult population in China in 1960 was 490 million. If we further assume that the percentage of peasants among the Chinese adult population was the same as the one among the total population--80 per cent, then there were 392 million adult peasants and 98 million urbanites in China in 1960. Match this peasant population with the peasant film audience in 1960: We arrived at the estimation that an adult peasant in 1960 viewed an average of 8.2 movies a year and an adult urbanite, 18.3 movies a year. A Chinese would then go to the movies an average of 10.2 times a year. If this were the true state of affairs in 1960, the Chinese people's movie attendance in 1960 was the sixth in the world.¹³⁵ This record represented an almost sevenfold increase from 1953's audience figure. The most dramatic growth of movie attendance took place from 1957 to 1958--from 1,330 million to 3,000 million. The year of 1960 was the peak year so far. Evidence existed that this dramatic growth in the period of 1957-1958 is due mainly to artificial measures;

¹³²Ta-Kung Pao (Impartial Daily), Peking, December 14, 1962.

¹³³See discussion on the increase of Chinese population since 1957 in The New York Times, January 5, 1964.

¹³⁴See Leo Orleans, Professional Manpower and Education in Communist China, Library of Congress, 1960.

It should be noted that both the absolute number of audience given by the Communist report and our estimate of adult audience are arbitrary. The Communist figure is highly likely to have included children who are usually excluded in estimating film audiences in the West. Our estimate of adult audience has inevitably included many children.

¹³⁵See Wilbur Schramm (ed.), Mass Communication, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960, p. 666 (Table).

attendance declined after 1960. Now let us take a closer look at this great leap forward in film attendance in 1958:

Table X: Growth of Film Attendance
in Communist China¹³⁶

<u>Year</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Movies Attended per Year (per Adult)</u>
1953	755,000,000	1.8
1954	822,402,662	1.9
1955	900,000,000	2.1
1956	1,400,000,000	3.2
1957	1,330,000,000	2.9
1958	3,000,000,000	6.3
1959	4,000,000,000	8.4
1960	5,400,000,000	10.2

¹³⁶The figures for 1953, 1956, 1957 and 1960 are all from SCMP, with serial numbers No. 968, No. 1573, No. 1463 and No. 2464; the figures for 1954 and 1955 are from Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 10, 1955 and No. 7, 1956; and the 1958 and 1959 figures are from Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 3, 1959. The attendance figures are computed by this author, taking population figures from S. Chandrasekhar, China's Population, Hong Kong University Press, 1960 and the 1959 and 1960 population figures are estimated by others.

Table XI: Film Attendance in 1958¹³⁷

Location	Adult Population (70% of total)	Audience Number (in million)	Attendance per adult
Peking	1,937,704	65.2	33.6
Tientsin	1,885,682	47.6	25.2
Shanghai	4,343,092	75.4	17.4
Hopei	25,189,251	157.5	6.3
Shansi	10,020,140	68.1	6.8
Inner Mongolia	4,270,073	27.3	6.3
Liaoning	12,981,603	250.2	19.2
Kirin	7,903,051	64.4	8.2
Heilunkiang	8,368,116	109.3	13.0
Shensi	11,116,897	76.6	6.9
Kansu	9,049,671	40.0	4.4
Tsinghai	1,173,574	13.1	10.9
Sinkiang	3,411,526	28.0	8.2
Shantung	34,213,584	229.3	6.7
Kiangsu	28,876,534	155.0	5.3
Anhwei	21,240,546	82.7	3.8
Chekiang	16,006,023	81.3	5.1
Fukien	8,199,905	40.5	4.9
Honan	30,950,216	208.0	6.7
Hupei	19,452,785	99.8	5.2
Hunan	23,258,868	157.1	6.7
Kiangsi	11,741,006	74.6	6.4
Kwangtung	24,339,041	278.5	11.4
Kwangsi	13,692,575	88.9	6.5
Szechuan	43,612,799	208.0	4.7
Kweichow	10,526,117	58.2	5.5
Yunnan	12,230,916	57.8	4.7

¹³⁷The population figures are based on Chandrasekhar, op. cit.; the audience figures are from Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 3, 1959, p. 6; and the attendance figures are computed by this author.

The Great Leap Forward in Movie Attendance in 1958

The distribution of film audience of provinces in 1958 is presented in Table XI.

First of all, Table XI shows the expected positive correlation between population and film attendance. The correlation coefficient between these two variables is .77, which is statistically significant.¹³⁸

However, Table XI also shows an interesting phenomenon: The correlation coefficient between the population and film attendance per adult in each province is negative though it is not statistically significant ($r = -.24$). This negative correlation is interesting and important because it shows the artificiality of the big increase of film audience in 1958 in Communist China.

The negative correlation between the provincial population and film attendance per adult shows the Communist regime's more intensive mobilization of the people in sparsely populated provinces than that of the people in other provinces. When we arrange the film attendance per adult in rank order,¹³⁹ we find that Tsinghai and Sinkiang, the two most sparsely populated provinces in China, occupy the seventh and eighth places in rank order of film attendance per adult while their ranks in population are fifteenth and seventeenth.¹⁴⁰ If we look into the social characteristics of these four provinces, the reason for the regime's mobilization of these people becomes clear.

Tsinghai and Sinkiang are China's border provinces where some of China's minority races reside. It has been the Peking regime's policy that these minority people who were relatively left alone in the Nationalist era should

¹³⁸The statistical formula for computing "r" is from William L. Hays, Statistics for Psychologists. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, p. 506.

¹³⁹The province that has the biggest attendance per adult occupies the first place; the next biggest occupies the second place, etc.

¹⁴⁰The rank order of population is arranged in the same order as that of film attendance per adult.

be assimilated rapidly into the Chinese culture under the Communist leadership. The increase of film attendance in these two provinces in 1958 seems to be part of this planned assimilation process. While Shensi and Shansi are within the mainstream of the Chinese culture, they are economically backward. The 1958 Great Leap Forward campaign had the twin targets of rapidly developing the more backward provinces in China and China itself.

Peking, then, adopted the policy of aiding the backward provinces more than the relatively developed provinces. While we do not have data on the four provinces mentioned above, we can cite the cases of film development in Inner Mongolia, a backward region, and Fukien, a relatively developed region, as an illustration of this general policy of the regime.

In 1956, Inner Mongolia had 83 mobile projection teams, yet in 1958 it had 210 teams plus a newsreel studio.¹⁴¹ Hence, from 1956 to 1958, 127 new projection teams were added in Inner Mongolia. While in Fukien there were 200 mobile projection teams before 1958, by the end of the same year there were 220--only 20 more teams were added.¹⁴² Now in 1958, Inner Mongolia had 210 mobile projection teams and Fukien had 220. Yet the population of Inner Mongolia was about six million and that of Fukien was 13 million. It is doubtful that Inner Mongolia could have achieved such a result without extra government aid.

Not only did the government provide film facilities for these backward provinces but it made it possible for the people there to attend films free of charge also. Thus, a peasant in the backward Kweichow province could go to a movie free¹⁴³ while a peasant in Kwantung had to buy a ticket to see a movie.¹⁴⁴ In such a circumstance, an individual's

¹⁴¹ SCMP, No. 1295 (1956), p. 19; No. 1753 (1958), p. 39; and No. 1795 (1958), p. 37.

¹⁴² Ibid., No. 1934 (1959), p. 26.

¹⁴³ Ibid., No. 2997 (1963), p. 12.

¹⁴⁴ From unclassified and unpublished Research Report, U.S.I.S., Hong Kong Bureau, 1960, p. 22.

probability of attending a film showing is much higher in the more backward provinces than in the more developed ones.

Secondly, we find that the three provinces which constitute the area known as Manchuria--Liaoning, Kirin, and Heilunkiang--are high in rank order of film attendance. There are several possible reasons for this phenomenon. Manchuria is now China's industrial center. More than half of China's railway mileage is in Manchuria. It is also China's largest arsenal. To secure this area socially and politically is one of Peking's imperative tasks. When the regime started building a modern mass media system in China in the early 1950's, it gave priority to industrial centers. Manchuria naturally was given a high priority.

The fact that people in Manchuria were given more Communist indoctrination is hardly surprising. This again shows the planned or artificial nature of film attendance in Communist China.

Thirdly, the leap in movie attendance was also partly accomplished by increasing the number of shows in every cinema and of mobile projection teams to a fantastic degree. Here we present several accounts to show this frenzy of film showings in 1958. First, a report from Kiangsi:

"But some showing units look only for quantity. One unit was reported to have given 20 to 30 shows a day. People were awakened at midnight for viewing films..."¹⁴⁵

Another complaint letter is from Kiangsu and was published in a professional film journal in Communist China. The letter reads in part:

"Kiangnan Movie Theater (in Soochow, Kiangsu) and its branch theater have been giving 72 shows a day--that is, 36 shows a day by each theater. In still another case, the No. 1 Projection Team at Fen Chen Hsien (Feng Chen County) once gave 47 shows within 16 hours--

¹⁴⁵Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 8, 1959, p. 1

an average of one show per 20 minutes. Deducting the time for the change of films, entering and exiting of audiences, cooling off the projector and the pre- and post-show propaganda speeches, the real show lasted only 10 minutes or less. In other words, only a 400-foot film could be shown. To count movie showings in this way, in my opinion, is not correct."¹⁴⁶

There were many progress reports from film showing units. A Kwangsi commune projection team, for example, reported that "under the leadership of the Party's local branch office, we opened breakfast shows, supper shows, pre-and post-conference shows, field shows during the resting intervals, special shows for elders and children."¹⁴⁷

In Shansi, special hours were set aside for service workers in stores, restaurants and bus companies to go to movies in their off-work period. In Canton, the Yen Chen Movie House in 1958 opened midnight shows for the night-shift workers. "Every night many workers would not wait to finish cleaning their hands in order to get into the theater. Some called in advance to make group reservations. From November 17th to the 30th, the theater gave 43 midnight shows and the audiences totaled 11,520.

An extra profit of 589.30 yuan was added to the theater's contribution to the state."¹⁴⁸ In one village when a movie was going on in the open field, "a red ball arose from the horizon. The audience could not see the picture any more. It was already daybreak and the sun was rising. The comrades of the projection team said to the people: 'If you cannot see the picture, well, just listen to the sound.'"¹⁴⁹ The writer of this letter then concluded with angry words which summed up the atmosphere of the Great Leap Forward in film attendance and the people's reactions to it:

¹⁴⁶ Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 5, 1959, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., No. 1, 1959, p. 16.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., No. 16, 1959, p. 14.

They (the movie showing personnel) only know statistical achievement but not the quality of showings. They do not care that people are exhausted after a day's hard work. They care only about their own fulfillment of the target. They do not care whether the audiences understand the film or not. So they say: 'If you can not see the picture, well, just listen to the sound.'¹⁵⁰

A significant fact, implied in all these letters, is that people were compelled to go to these shows. The reports that mentioned the support of the "local Party's branch office" and the angry cries of these complaint letters make this quite obvious. Movie attendance in these cases became a part of the mass movement of the Leap Forward.

Fourth and lastly, the increase of movie attendance and showings was also partly accomplished by false statistics. No good system of compiling statistical data on the film industry seemed to have been set up. Cinemas and projection teams were required to send in several forms recording their progress. In the period of 1958-1959, a special telegram report was issued, so that any team or showing unit that broke exhibition records could send the result via telegram. There were, in total, some 20 forms that each unit had to send into the local film bureau which, in turn, sent them to the Film Administrative Bureau under the State Council in Peking. By 1959, there were 18,000 professional or part-time statisticians working for film bureaus all over the nation.¹⁵¹

In 1959 the film bureau in Peking complained to its many subordinate units about this statistical reporting. A report revealed that even in 1959, only three of the nation's 27 provinces and autonomous regions had turned in "seven essential forms" for the years of 1957 and 1958.

¹⁵⁰ Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 16, 1959, p. 14.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., No. 8, 1959, pp. 11-12.

Delays in turning in statistical reports ranged from seven months to a year. According to the report, the most punctual provinces and regions were Heilungkiang, Kiangsi, Kwangsi, Shantung and the city of Shanghai. The least punctual ones were Kirin, Honan, Kiangsu, Szechuan and Anhwei.

The most serious problem was irresponsible reporting. "There are persons who do not follow the proper rules of filling out those forms. They do not look at the index on the forms. For example, on the form of yearly film distribution and projection, many provinces and cities do not fill out the columns on projection personnel, number of training classes and commune-operated projection teams. In the quarterly report on profit gained by each unit, many present inconsistent figures. Some forms are unreadable simply because of messy writing. All these have affected the compilation work...and the accuracy and reliability of the statistical data of our film industry."¹⁵²

In such circumstances, the probability of false statistical data in the progress report of each unit is certainly very high.

In sum, the high film attendance in the period of the Great Leap Forward was the result of several artificial measures. First, it was the result of heavy exhortations to the industrial worker in areas like Manchuria. A second cause was the regime's policy of bringing remote border areas and isolated regions to the level of the whole country in the nationwide Leap Forward movement. Third, it resulted from an unprecedented increase of film showings accomplished by showing more shorter documentaries; this, in turn, was made possible by the high regimentation of the population at this period. Fourth and finally, the cadres deliberately falsified audience and projection figures.

¹⁵²Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 8, 1959, pp. 11-12.

After 1959, the regime stopped releasing statistical information on the development of the film industry. Most probably, the film industry also suffered from the general failure of the Leap Forward movement. The burst of movie attendance during 1958 seems not to have continued.

Two reports on film showing facilities in 1962 and 1963 indicated that there was no significant increase from 1959 to 1963. The number of projection teams stayed at around 9,000. However, in April, 1964, a report stated that there were over 2,000 cinemas, 4,000 clubs and 12,000 film projection units in the nation.¹⁵³ It seemed that the trend toward increased film showing facilities revived after 1963.

A 1962 report indicated that a Chinese farmer now went to movies an average of threetimes a year and a 1965 report gave the average of five times a year.¹⁵⁴ Compared with the 1960 figure of 8.2 times a year, the two later figures indicate a substantial decline. Nevertheless, either the 1962 or the 1965 figure was higher than 1957's, the last year before the Great Leap Forward and its accompanying artificial inflation of attendance.

Cinema Projection in General

Generally speaking, cinemas in China have a relatively large seating capacity. In 1955 Peking built a new 700-seat cinema. Cinemas in one city often jointly show the same film, so that a person's choice is "to see" or "not to see." It is not a question of "which to see."¹⁵⁵ In Shanghai, it was reported that in 1963, one million people

¹⁵³ SCMP, No. 3205 (1964), pp. 19-20.

¹⁵⁴ Ta-Kung Pao (Impartial Daily), Peking, December 14, 1962, and Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), January 25, 1965.

¹⁵⁵ This fact was pointed out by the former American soldier, Scott Rush (ref. p. 47).

(at the same time) saw the film, "Plain Ablaze"--a strike story--and "at popular request the 16 cinema houses that are showing the film extend the run of the film and add extra shows every day."¹⁵⁶

In cinemas, shows are preceded by political propaganda slides. Free "explanation sheets" are distributed to the audiences, which summarize the plot of the picture and give the correct political interpretation. This procedure was used in the pre-Communist era not for political propaganda but to explain foreign films. Now, in addition to summarizing the plot of the film, these sheets list discussion topics relevant to the film and a selected bibliography for further readings on related subjects.

Frequently, film viewing is part of the regime's regimentation of people's daily lives. The practice of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party in Dairen is a model. It sponsored special "movie lectures" to give the right interpretations of movies to the youth in the city. From 1952 to 1954, 15 lectures were sponsored and 16,000 persons attended. For each film different types of audiences were organized to attend the lectures, such as workers, policemen, etc. The Department also sponsored "movie discussion sessions" and a "movie review column" in local newspapers. It cooperated with the Young Communist League in promoting propaganda for certain films among the youth. Before a film was shown, letters were sent to league branches asking them to organize youth to view the film, to advertise the film in wall newspapers, to call meetings, to ask youth to write afterthought reports and to broadcast the reviews or correct interpretations of the film over radio.¹⁵⁷ Such mass organizational activities for film viewing has been carried out since the regime came to power on the Chinese mainland. The Young Communist

¹⁵⁶ SCMP, No. 3126 (1963), p. 23.

¹⁵⁷ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), No. 19, 1954, pp. 28-29.

League has been the headquarters for mobilizing the students and the labor unions for mobilizing the workers.

Beside these regular shows, various film festivals were held. In February, 1956, a children's film week was held in 28 cities in China. Altogether 18 films were shown, including films from the Soviet Union. Over 1,660,000 children and their adult companions attended the shows during the special week.¹⁵⁸ In March, 1956, a "Good Films of 1955 Festival" was held in 33 cities. There were 9,000 shows and 7,470,000 in attendance.¹⁵⁹ The "1956 Film Festival" began in April, 1957, in 13 cities (Peking, Shanghai, Shenyang, Chengtu, Wuhan, Sian, Changchun, Tientsin, Urumchi, Canton, Nanking, and Chungking). Fifteen films were shown.¹⁶⁰ Again in 1958, a "1957 Film Festival" was held in the same 13 cities and 22 films were shown.¹⁶¹

Projection Teams and the Chinese Peasants

By 1962, there were 9,000 mobile projection teams roving the countryside, bringing movies to the peasants. A team is usually formed by three members and in most cases, the members are young girls. A team is typically equipped with a generator, a 16 mm. projector and a gramophone. In addition, many teams have facilities for making slides, which is an essential part of the teams' work. The government's target is to equip every township with a projection team. There are 90,000 townships in China, and with only 9,000 mobile projection teams (in 1962), a team's work load is heavy.

Essential conditions for effective operation of these mobile teams would be a good rural road system, and a supply of trucks. But roads in rural areas are poor, and trucks are not available to the mobile teams. These defi-

¹⁵⁸ SCMP, No. 1233, p. 11, and No. 1237, p. 17.

¹⁵⁹ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), No. 16, 1956, p.20.

¹⁶⁰ SCMP, No. 1504, p.11 and Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying, No. 4, 1957, p. 24.

¹⁶¹ SCMP, No. 1741, pp. 14-15.

ciencies have made the lot of the mobile teams unusually hard. They have to travel by ox or horse cart, and many of them simply have to walk, carrying all their equipment. This is especially true in border regions like Sinkiang, Tsinghai, Tibet, Mongolia and Manchuria. For example, a mobile projection team in Tsinghai Plateau had to fight its way through erratic weather on ox carts:

"It snows even in June. Every day, it will rain four or six times and then gets sunny in between. Sometimes, it is cold and sometimes hot. You have to put on thick cotton clothes all year long. In the winter the weather can be 30 or 40 below zero. They fight and struggle on this Plateau. Going from one projection point to another will take them three or four days. They walk an average of 50 miles a day. Every trip involves taking the equipment apart and assembling it. The generator has to be separated into two parts and then put on the back of a buffalo. They usually eat only twice a day; lunch is often given up."¹⁶²

In Tibet, the "roof of the world," "the projection comrades have to carry a projector and a generator across high mountains which weigh a hundred pounds. On location five to six thousand feet above sea level, people get dizzy and feel weak. Often, a person falls before he can put the equipment on his shoulders."¹⁶³ In the Chanpai Mountains along the Sino-Korean border, a mobile team, covering two people's communes, would spend a month to go a round of 400 miles. Travelling by ox-cart, the team took two hours to travel 4.5 miles.¹⁶⁴

The hardships of the mobile projection teams have still not come to an end. Indeed, the real job begins when a team reaches a location, or the so-called "showing point." Here is a team in Manchuria:

¹⁶² Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying, No. 14 (1956), p. 35.

¹⁶³ Ibid., No. 16 (1956), p. 39.

¹⁶⁴ Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), June 8, 1964.

"With the Party's due consideration and care and the people's encouragement, this team has achieved a definite result in a short span. In eight months of the year (1960), it has given 1,044 shows, fulfilling a year's plan within a half-year period. A total of 724,000 peasants have seen the shows and been educated...

"This team has achieved the fame of being a projection team, a propaganda team, a production team and a service team. They have added to their service programs 'picture exhibits,' a 'mobile book library,' 'pictorial charts of the development of agriculture,' 'propaganda for newspaper reading,' 'writing letters for the people' (for elders only), 'helping weld pots and buckets,' 'haircutting,' 'repairing loud-speakers,' 'repairing telephones,' 'selling new books,' etc. Within 26 days in August, the team had sold 486 books (246 books by Chairman Mao, 241 books on agriculture) for Hsin Hua Shu Tien (New China Book Store). Some 8,200 peasants have read Chairman Mao's books from the 'mobile book library'; 2,900 people have seen the pictures in the 'Good is the People's Communes' exhibit; some 140 pots and buckets have been repaired and welded; and the team comrades became voluntary barbers during the busy season of planting when not enough barbers were around... Within a month's time, 373 peasants had their hair cut by the team members. Aside from all these jobs, the team members repaired wired broadcasting loud-speakers and commune telephones. This team has become a dear friend of many peasants and an effective assistant for the Party's propaganda."¹⁶⁵

One wonders whether a team like the above can still find time to give an average of 3.2 shows a day to an average of 692 peasants per show, as implied by the report. Usually giving a show involves complicated procedures. A single show involves three steps: pre-show propaganda, an impromptu explanation during the show and an after-show collection of opinions.

¹⁶⁵Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 22, 1960, p. 23.

Pre-show propaganda is designed to mobilize peasants to attend the film and then there is a pre-show speech to ensure that the peasants interpret the film properly and to introduce them to its characters and themes. Mobilization for attending the film is carried out through propaganda sheets distributed by local cadres, school teachers and activists, through wall-newspapers, oral agitation, and broadcasting over loudspeakers. Introduction of the main characters is usually done orally, sometimes assisted by slide shows. For example, one projection team, before the showing of the film, "Bumper Crop," wrote the theme of the film into a ballad and then projected it onto the screen, which said: "There is no end to our production; conservatism and complacency are self-deceits; the road of capitalism leads to a dead-end; the farmers' only road is the road of cooperatives."¹⁶⁶

The impromptu explanation during the show is designed to help introduce the characters and to explain the meaning of scenes that use special film techniques. The team's audiences are mostly illiterate peasants who lack the capability to comprehend things unfamiliar to their immediate environment.

The after-show collection of audience opinion is carried out in the form of calling a film review conference, or the local cadres are required to go to the shows and take down any spontaneous comments made by the peasants while viewing. The possibility of the projection team's collecting and reporting genuine audience reaction, of course, depends on the individual team. Sometimes, the government also provides cues as to what kind of "grass root" film review is correct. An example is an article in the nation's leading literary journal, Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette). The article is entitled: "A Fruitful,

¹⁶⁶ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 17, 1954, p. 33.

Lively Film Review." Eight people were on the reviewing panel. Six of them can be considered Party mouthpieces--the production brigade leader, women's working team leader, village accountant, school teacher, secretary of the Young Communist League and secretary of the local Communist Party. The two other members were a 58-year-old woman and a 65-year-old man. The review, of course, was full of praises of the film, of Chairman Mao and of the Party.¹⁶⁷

To illustrate how a team carries out the three steps of film showing, let us turn to the story of a projectionist, Lao Meng, who is said to be loved by the peasants for his ingenuity in helping them to understand the film:

"Peasants like Lao Meng because he can help them understand the films they are viewing. When his team was one day screening 'Elm-tree Farm' at Chingchiao Commune, the feature film was preceded by lantern slides about current affairs: the opening of the conference of the representatives of advanced agricultural collectives in East China. Even peasants who had not been reading newspapers knew very well the vital bearing of this major event on themselves. The lantern slides were followed by a short feature about a couple discussing plans for selling their surplus grain yields. Lao Meng used this episode to tell a story, against the background of tremendous changes that have taken place in the lives of peasants in the new and old societies, in an attempt to stimulate recollections of past hardships and remind the audience of present blessings, and to establish the Communist ideas of giving consideration first to things for the public good rather than for private purposes. Lao Meng made the introductory remark, with the help of a little singing by himself, about the characters that were to appear in the feature film, with the projection of lantern

¹⁶⁷Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette), Peking, No. 24, 1960, pp. 24-25.

slides. In introducing the character, Kuo Ta Niang, he sang, imitating the tune of Yang Liu-ching: "Kuo Ta-niang is a country woman, who has been educated and trained by the Party. She adheres to a firm standpoint when doing everything..." Lao thus made it easy for the audience to recognize which characters in the film were good people and which were bad people, without the need of finding out from neighbors when watching the film.

"After the screening of the film was over, Lao Meng interpreted the dialogue carried on between characters in the film by getting at the root of the meaning. For instance, when Kuo Ta Niang was back home from a wedding banquet, she cheerfully sang a song, looking at Li Lao-kang's child. This scene, meaning something else not graphically depicted in the film, could not be readily comprehended by the peasants. Lao Meng said: 'This shows the superiority of collectivization.' Lao Meng's interpretation closed the gap between the film and the audience."¹⁶⁸

In selecting films for rural showings, the main principle is to help production. A Heilunkiang mobile projection team leader, a young girl, reports:

"Movie projection teams in the villages are the vanguards of propaganda for supporting agriculture and constructing new socialist farms. In order to maximize our function, we should not only let more peasants see more movies but also select appropriate films according to the Party's policy and the demands of the masses. Thus the peasants can have deeper socialist education, scientific knowledge and can better fulfill their production plan... For example, when we learned about the Ching Lin Commune's repairing a dam, we showed them 'The Young Men in Our Village.' After viewing it several times, some young men in that commune said: 'Since they can bring water into the mountains, we can surely dig a reservoir in the ground.'

"In order to do a good job in village movie showings, the film team must keep in close contact with the local Party members and the

¹⁶⁸ SCMM, No. 371 (1963), pp. 20-22.

commune members and understand their work, thoughts, and demands. Then we can select the appropriate film according to the current political situation and the struggles and demands of the masses. To better serve agricultural production, it is essential that we do a good job in the selection and scheduling of the films."¹⁶⁹

What, then, are the peasant's reactions to these mobile film teams and the films that they show?

It seems that the peasants complain most about the quality of both the films and the showings. In a report entitled, "Peasants Do Not Like Some Agricultural Films," the writer, himself a mobile projection member in the outskirts of Peking, says:

"Yesterday, we gave a show at Sun Ho and announced that next time we would show the film, 'The Spring Has Come.' Immediately the audience asked: 'Is there anything new in it? Why do you always give us this kind of film?' One old woman said: 'Now even if you pay me to come to see the film, I will not come.' Of course, improvement of film propaganda is needed. But under such circumstances, no matter how you improve propaganda, you can hardly increase the audience."¹⁷⁰

Another film projection team reports:

"We think the fact that peasants do not like to see agricultural films does not mean that they do not want to see all agricultural films. The problem is what kind of agricultural films we are showing them. If we can give them some feature films with realistic themes and vivid characterization, we think they will like it. At present most of our films on rural life have mediocre themes, superficial characterization and, hence, they do not arouse any interest among the peasants."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Kwang-Ming Jih-Pao (Kwang Ming Daily), May 1, 1963.

¹⁷⁰ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 10, 1957, p. 17.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

The unpopularity of the films themselves is often compounded by malfunctioning projectors. Stories and letters to editors are profuse on this problem. In some cases, curiosity drives peasants to travel for miles to come to a showing place only to be turned back by mechanical failures. Then there is also the problem that films come late to rural residents. Perhaps the best synthesis of all these problems is the following satirical poem, entitled, "Think of the Rural Audience"¹⁷²;

"There in the village a great wave of
agricultural cooperatives has risen,
There in the city a great wave of
support for the village has also risen;
Tools of all types,
That our big brother worker has sent us;
To the village club have come
Many interesting books and newspapers;
Let me ask our film distribution comrade,
What, then, is your plan?

"The cities have seen Tien Hsien Pai (1955 film) *
But we have just seen
Liang Shan-Po Yu Chu Ying-Tai (1953)
The cities are showing 'Tung Tsun-jui' (1955)
But 'May Day of 1954'
Has just come to our place.

"The films are old, though
We do not want to let it go;
While the setting sun is still on top
of the hill,
We have already been waiting in front
of the screen;
But, then, what are you actually
showing?

"Either the screen is a white blur,
Or there are ceaseless 'rain stripes'
And not a human figure can be seen;
Also, why is it that not a sound
is heard?

¹⁷²Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 13, 1956, p. 35.

* The parentheses are inserted by this author to indicate the date of the films.

"Look now, at last we hear a sound.
Suddenly the projector breaks down;
The enthusiastic projectionist
Has been so panicky that he sweats.

"What films are you showing?
Our dear comrade in the distribution
company,
You ought to know the answer.
Let me ask, just when
Will you let us see a new film?"

Some mobile teams also tend to concentrate their showings around urban centers, where they can make more profits to be turned over to the state. "In 1952 Kwangtung province had 187 mobile projection teams and in 1957 there were 561, of which 305 were for rural showings. In 1961, there were 1,150 teams and 618 of them were for rural showings. But the teams were only showing films in densely populated areas so more profits could be turned over to the state. Many communes kept over 80 per cent of the showings for themselves. In places where commune organs are located (places with good communication facilities and dense population), the number of film shows represents from 40 to 60 per cent of the total given by the commune projection teams."¹⁷³

In 1959 a Communist journal's survey of its readers' complaints against the projection teams revealed that they all criticized two things: low quality and low quantity. By low quality was meant the frequent mechanical malfunctions of the projector and by low quantity was meant the low frequency of showings and the lack of a variety of films.

To the criticism of constant technical failures, the film bureau replied that it was partly due to the frequent shifting of personnel on the projection teams. "When some projection teams were sent down to be under

¹⁷³ SCMP, No. 2826 (1962), pp. 10-11.

the commune's supervision, the projection work often was given to new persons. The old and experienced ones were sent to work in other positions. The new crew did not know the machine well."¹⁷⁴ The film bureau also said that lack of spare parts was another reason for this. Then the third reason was interference with the projection team's work by local officials. For example, a projection team in Liaoning complained in a letter,

"Recently different units have been holding many conferences to discuss the development of communes and they always wanted the projection team to show movies for the conferences. Sometimes, conferences with less than 100 participants also called us to show movies for them...Once we were called to show movies to a 60-member health conference. We were then just about to go to a village on a hill. We have been in that village only once since we were sent down here. Many posters have been criticizing us for neglecting this village. Our trip to that village was delayed by that health conference."¹⁷⁵

The present state of mobile projection teams is difficult to guess, for the government reports often are vague and sometimes contradict each other. To be sure, the Communist government has laid a foundation of a wide rural distribution network. Now at least a peasant knows what a movie is and perhaps can view a film once or twice a year. In areas like Manchuria and East China, a peasant may have more opportunities to go to the movies.

Yet, on the whole, film showing in rural areas remains a weak link in Communist China's communication system. The government has been doing its utmost to improve this situation within the limits of economic strains. A film meeting in 1960 passed the following resolutions to

¹⁷⁴Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 14, 1959, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., No. 8, 1959, p. 9

bolster rural movies: (1) The best and most experienced writers, directors and actors would be assigned to produce several first-class films especially for peasant consumption; (2) one third of the 1960 film schedule would be allocated to films with rural themes; (3) rural distribution of films would be tremendously increased; and (4) employees would be sent into rural areas to gain first-hand knowledge from agricultural workers.¹⁷⁶ In 1962 the government called a film distribution conference. Subsequently it was decided that in order to help increase rural film showings, each urban showing unit would contribute a projector to the outlying villages. Copies of educational-scientific films were to be increased. Mobile projection teams were to be specifically increased in areas that grow cotton and rice.¹⁷⁷

This suggests that the government is unable to supply sufficient projectors to rural areas. Hence it has adopted the policy of selecting strategic areas and improving film exhibitions in these areas first. On March 25, 1963, Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily) published an editorial entitled "Cultural and Artistic Work Must Serve Rural Areas Better":

"However, it must be pointed out that cultural work serving the countryside has remained a weak link in the entire cultural endeavor over the past few years. Cultural and artistic work has been insufficiently directed toward the countryside and the peasants. Films fit for the countryside and the taste of peasants are shown on very rare occasions..."

¹⁷⁶ Current Scene, February 28, 1961.

¹⁷⁷ New China Year Book of 1962 (In Japanese text), Tokyo: China Research Institute, 1963.

CHAPTER FIVE

The New Roles of Foreign Films in China

Films from the Communist Bloc

The Peking government stamped out Anglo-American films in 1950 and let a flood of Soviet films into China. These tapered off after 1960.

Before 1960, the number of Soviet feature films imported yearly exceeded domestic production. From 1949 to 1956, 405 Soviet films were imported, of which 189 were feature films and 115 educational-scientific ones.¹⁷⁸ The most optimistic estimate of the total number of feature films made in China from 1949 to 1956 does not exceed 187.

To popularize the Soviet films, the Communist regime sponsored many "Soviet Film Weeks" every year. In 1953 four such "weeks" were held.¹⁷⁹ Soviet film festivals were held in Peking, Tientsin, Shanghai and other major cities in China. The audience figure for the 1953 festivals was 2.7 million.¹⁸⁰ According to the Director of the Film Administrative Bureau, Wang Lan-hsi, from 1949 to 1957 Soviet films had an audience of some 1,490,000,000.¹⁸¹ There is little doubt that these audiences were organized. Eric Chou wrote:

"Never keen on seeing Russian pictures, I saw one English, one French, and one Mexican picture during my stay in Peking. Yen once accompanied me to see the visiting Russian circus in the Municipal Gymnasium. Though the performances were nothing spectacular, a great number of Communist bigwigs were among the audience. On such occasions, their presence was counted as a sign of Sino-Soviet friendship, as well as a

¹⁷⁸ Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), January 12, 1957.

¹⁷⁹ SCMP, No. 717 (1953), pp. 2-3.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., No. 1419 (1956), p. 30.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., No. 1647 (1957), p. 18.

a political mission. In Communist China, even the audience of a circus had to be planned and organized."¹⁸²

In the early days of the Peking regime, it really wanted to learn Socialist film art from the Soviet Union. As early as 1952, Chou En-lai sent a special directive to Chinese film workers, urging them to learn from the Soviet films. In 1954 a Chinese film delegation was sent to the Soviet Union to learn from the Soviets. Between 1958 and 1959, several pictures were made jointly by the Soviet Union and Communist China, such as "The Wind Blows from the East," "A Lane in the Woods," "The Yangtze River," "The Volga," and "Alma Ata-Lanchow."

With deteriorating diplomatic relations between the two nations, film exchanges dropped off. "Tickets to Soviet movies are no longer distributed as part of the political study curriculum..."¹⁸³ On November 26, 1963, the Wen-Yi Pao (Literary Gazette) contained an article by a Chinese film critic who sharply assailed G. Chukhrai, Soviet director of the well-known "Ballad of a Soldier." Chukhrai was called a "revisionist" by the Chinese critic. The article says:

"The smell of bourgeois humanitarianism and pacifism spread by the films shows, in the field of art and ideology, precisely the political line of modern revisionism and the political demand for 'peaceful evolution' from socialism to capitalism. The films of Chukhrai, which rather fully, vividly and prominently reflect this political line and demand, well deserve to be called 'specimens of modern revisionist art.'" ¹⁸⁴

On July 3, 1964, the Peking Review reprinted an editorial from Communist China's chief ideological journal,

¹⁸²Eric Chou, op. cit., pp. 243-244.

¹⁸³Stanley Karnow, "Refugee Reports on Red China," The Reporter, July 18, 1963.

¹⁸⁴SCMP, No. 3110 (1963), p. 5.

Hungchi (Red Flag), which assailed Khrushchev directly for the state of Soviet art and literature:

"From the literature and art of modern revisionism represented by Khrushchev, its theater included, we have already seen how the revisionists lavishly disseminate the bourgeois theory of human nature, humanitarianism, pacifism and so on, how they do their utmost to oppose revolution, attack the dictatorship of the proletariat and besmirch the socialist system; they bring in the rotten and degenerated 'novel' art of U.S. imperialism, give publicity to the American way of life and poison the masses in the socialist countries, particularly the younger generation, with all sorts of things that are decadent, debauched and reactionary so as to corrupt them mentally and morally and sap their will power..."

Apparently, "cultural exchange" between Peking and Moscow has ceased for the time being.

Communist China also sponsored film weeks for Eastern European nations. The peak of such exchanges was in 1956, when three countries--Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia--opened their film festivals in Peking.

Films from Western Nations

The first Western film shown in Communist China since 1950 was the Italian film, "The Bicycle Thief." Chinese soundtrack was dubbed in and it was first shown in ten Peking cinemas in 1954.¹⁸⁵ The regime approved many Italian films which specialized in depicting the darker sides of capitalist society. In 1957 Chinese and Italian film workers jointly made a wide-screen documentary on the natural beauty of Kweilin province.¹⁸⁶ In the same

¹⁸⁵ SCMP, No. 918, 1954.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., No. 1512 (1957), p. 20.

year an Italian Film Week was opened in Peking, Shanghai, Wuhan, Sian and Shenyang. The audiences totaled 1,300,000.¹⁸⁷ Other Italian pictures shown in China included, "There Is No Peace Under the Olive Tree," "Rome, Eleven O'Clock," and "Road of Hope."

A French film week was opened in major Chinese cities in 1956 and 3,000,000 saw "Fanfan La Tulipe" and three other French films.¹⁸⁸ In 1957 the French Carrousel Film Studio and the Peking Film Studio jointly made a feature film, "Kite," about some Paris children who found a Chinese kite in the shape of the Monkey King, the main character of the novel, A Journey to the West. Through the Monkey King's magic, the French children came to Peking,¹⁸⁹ as the story goes.

In 1957 the first British film was shown in Communist China since 1950. The film was "Great Expectations," adapted from Charles Dickens' novel, with Chinese dubbed in by the Shanghai Film Studio. Before it was shown in public cinemas, a preview was held for a selected audience and the Party press.¹⁹⁰ "Great Expectations" was followed by two other British films, "Hamlet" and "Pickwick Papers." The reason for selecting these films was quite obvious. The dark world of Charles Dickens and the despair of Hamlet were intended to represent the state of contemporary British society.

The most interesting event in the history of Western films in Communist China was the showing of an American film there.

In 1956, the U.S. film, "Salt of the Earth," was shown in Communist China. It was shown again in 1961. On

¹⁸⁷ SCMP, No. 1647 (1957).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., No. 1406 (1956), p. 55.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., No. 1505 (1957), p. 28.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., No. 1471 (1957), p. 35.

March 17, 1961, Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily) devoted a whole page to a discussion of this film. "Salt of the Earth" is about a group of American zinc miners in New Mexico. The miners were of Mexican origin, and their story reportedly was said to be historically true. The movie tells of a strike organized by the local labor union, allegedly in October, 1950. The strike was said to last for 15 months and the miners finally won a victory. The Jen-Min Jih-Pao reported that the film script writer, a certain Mr. Wilson, was persecuted by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and was on the black list kept by "Hollywood film companies backed by monopolists." The actress of the film was said to be a Mexican and was deported by U.S. immigration officers before she could finish her role in the film. The Chinese newspaper further said that this film was made under the constant harrassment of the American police. This, so far, has been the only American film shown in Communist China since 1950.

The Communists dubbed Chinese into almost all foreign films. In a recent report, dated Peking, 1964, a French correspondent writes:

"Foreign films are being shown, dubbed in Chinese. These include Western productions (but not American ones), and I am informed by better Chinese scholars than I am that the Chinese dialogue is not altogether faithful to the original. Nor are foreign films presented for what they are. A successful English comedy about military life was recently offered to Chinese audiences as a serious film and their attention drawn to this aspect of the decadent state of imperialist countries and the inefficiencies and corruption prevalent in their armies.

"A great many more foreign productions are imported without being shown to the general public. They are studied by experts 'from a technical point of view,' the official Chinese news agency recently pointed out."¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), February 2, 1960.

Though the Communist Party did its utmost to eliminate Western influence on Chinese film workers, it turned out to be not so successful. In 1960, Vice Minister of Culture, Hsia Yen wrote:

"At a certain meeting, I said it was a wonder how certain film workers could be so reluctant to accept Party instructions, how they could find it so difficult to follow Party principles and yet how they could be so ready and willing to accept so-called new methods and new techniques in foreign pictures. Some time ago, a technique known as 'poetic montage' made its appearance. It was avidly accepted by some people and applied to their work, regardless of whether it was necessary or not or whether it could be liked by the masses..."¹⁹²

Though Hsia Yen did not say whether by "foreign" he meant "Western," it is most likely that this was the case. The Chinese film workers generally detested Soviet films. In the Hundred Flower campaign of 1956 and 1957, they openly criticized the Party for urging them to learn from the Soviets. Thus, Wang Lan-hsi, Director of the Film Administrative Bureau, said: "they seek to deny the superiority of such a system and refuse to learn from the Soviet experience, stating that such will throttle creativeness; they want to encourage specialization and oppose planning in an attempt to prod the people's motion picture industry onto the road of capitalism."¹⁹³

Afro-Asian Films

Film festivals for Asian countries were also held in Communist China, presumably as an important feature in Peking's cultural exchange diplomacy. An Indian Film Festival was held in Peking in 1955 and a Japanese film delegation was invited to tour China in 1957. In the same year a Chinese economic mission to Cambodia presented King Suramairt with four Chinese color films "for the

¹⁹² Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily), February 2, 1960.

¹⁹³ SCMM, No. 123, 1958, pp. 24-36.

entertainment of His Majesty."¹⁹⁴ Peking also signed a film exchange agreement with North Korea in 1957.

On August 31, 1957, the Asian Film Week was opened in Peking. Sixteen countries participated in this film week. They were Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaya, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Suria, Tadzhikistan, Thailand and North Vietnam. Peking's Ta-Kung Pao (The Impartial Daily) said editorially that "the rush for tickets in Peking and the other reactions to the event showed the 'Asian feeling' of the people arising from the common desire to preserve peace, uphold national independence and oppose colonialism."¹⁹⁵

The only African nation that has opened a film festival in Peking has been Egypt. It was held in October, 1957, and 300,000 residents of Peking were organized to attend the film week. The festival was also held in Shanghai and Tientsin. The film shown was "Let the World Know," on the Anglo-French invasion of the Suez Canal.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ SCMP, No. 1525 (1957), p. 34.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., No. 1605 (1957), pp. 37-41.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., No. 1627 (1957), p. 48.

CHAPTER SIX

The Future

For the first time in China's history, the government has built a centralized communication system. Within this vast system, film is but only one branch. Nevertheless, this audio-visual medium, in a country characterized by mass illiteracy, naturally has a main role to play in the regime's overall design of propaganda and persuasion. Film enjoys unique persuasive and pedagogical advantages by virtue of presenting concrete visual material. Together with other mass media, film in China has become an exclusively governmental agent of propaganda. This, plus the state's monopoly of information on mainland China, have put the authorities in a position to carry out their grand design of persuasion. However, this monopoly has its disfunctions.

Film on mainland China has been criticized for low quality by the peasants, city dwellers, and, indeed, by the Party itself, though the criticisms apparently are not based on the same criteria. The Party wants politics and doctrines. The people want entertainment.

To resolve this conflict, the Party has taken measures both to cope with the immediate situation and to solve the more basic problems.

The immediate measure is to force people to go to movies frequently through various organizational means, although the generating of captive audiences is not approved by either the government or the people. For one thing, it requires a large organization and it puts the cadres in difficult positions in their relationships with the people. Furthermore it is a blow to the prestige of the elite; it is an indication of failure.

The basic solution is to acquire voluntary audiences through improvement of artistic quality, while still maintaining the political content. The usual Communist solution

is to train a new generation of film artists who are to be both politically loyal and professionally competent. This new generation, the Party expects, will turn out good and correct films that the people will like. In Communist China, there are two such schools: the Peking Motion Picture Academy and the Shanghai Cinema School, which was set up in 1959. The Changchun Film Studio is also training new film workers. Yet from 1956 to 1959 Communist China graduated only 332 students from these training centers. In 1958 the Peking school planned to graduate 1,000 students, but this sort of mass production itself defeats the school's very purpose. In 1960, the first group of directors was graduated from the Peking Motion Picture Academy.¹⁹⁷

If the past can be used to estimate the future, then the new graduates from these cinema schools are not likely to surpass their teachers, for the low quality of films is caused more by outside restrictions than by incompetence of the film artists. Veteran Communist film directors or script writers wrote their best works while working in the Communist underground during the pre-1949 era. Since then, they have written little and the few pieces of work they wrote after 1949 are very mediocre. This does not mean that they lost their talent after 1949. Their talent has been suppressed by the Party that they serve. These veteran writers and artists are now the teachers of the new Communist directors or actors. Since the same situation of ideological control persists, the students are likely to follow their teachers.

In the meantime the Party is not willing to remove the real bottlenecks, de-humanization and the demand to depict the ideal as real. Within this great wall of dogma, the Party keeps a vicious circle running: As more

¹⁹⁷ Ta-Tsun Tien-Ying (Popular Cinema), Peking, No. 18, 1956.

students graduate from schools, more works of "conceptualization and formularization" fill the film industry. The Party, frustrated and disappointed, adopts the same old remedy that demands for more ideological conformity from the film workers.

This vicious circle will not break unless there is a break in the great wall of dogma erected by Mao Tse-tung in his Yen-an Forum. The evolution of the Soviet film industry has pointed to this solution. The Soviets have certainly not knocked down their wall of dogma, but the Soviet artists have been permitted to portray life more realistically since Khrushchev's regime. The result is a new vitality in Soviet art and literature. In the film arena, this vitality is largely due to a change, as described by The New York Times Magazine, "from superman to human."¹⁹⁸ This is what Peking denounces as "bourgeois humanitarianism."

Thus the future of the Chinese Communist film depends specifically on the Peking regime's ideological stand. And a shift on this front, in a Communist totalitarian system, means an overall shift of the whole polity and society. When this shift will come is anybody's guess, though Mao Tse-tung has given us no sign of hope for such a change. If a change does occur, however, we can expect it to be reflected in film in particular and in art and literature in general.

¹⁹⁸The New York Times Magazine, March 22, 1964.

APPENDIX I

Distribution of Film Copy System

Film Copies That Must Be Shared Partially		Film Copies That Must Be Shared Completely (foreign)	
Copy Control Centers	Places Sharing the Copies	Copy Control Centers	Places Sharing
Peking with	Inner Mongolia, Shansi.	Peking with	Hopei, Shantung, Shansi, Inner Mongolia
Hopei with	Shantung		
Kirin with	Heilunkiang		
Shanghai with	Kiangsu, Fukien, Anhwei, Chekiang, Kiangsi.	Liaoning with	Kirin, Heilunkiang
		Shanghai with	Kiangsu, Fukien, Anhwei, Chekiang, Kiangsi.
Hupei with	Kwangsi, Hunan, Honan.		
		Hupei with	Honan, Hunan, Kwantung, Kwangsi.
Kwangtung, Szechuan with	Kweichow, Yunnan		
Shensi with	Chinhai, Kansu	Szechuan with	Yunnan, Kweichow.
Sinkiang		Shensi with	Kansu, Chinghai, Sinkiang.

Film copies produced in the studios in North China, Northeast and Northwest are to be sent to Anhwei; copies from the studios in Central-South, Southwest and South China to be sent to Kiangsi and the copies produced in Shanghai will be sent to Shanghai Film Distribution Company.

The China Film Distribution Company and the film studios will jointly decide when to issue independent copies for every province and when copies are to be shared, based on the political and artistic quality of the films.

(From Tien-Ying Yu Fang-Yien (Motion Picture and Projection), Peking, No. 6, 1959, p. 7.)

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