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**Popular History: Filming Opium War in Occupied Shagnai**

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## Popular History: Filming Opium War in Occupied Shanghai

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### Abstract

The first Chinese-language film on the Opium War is *Wanshi liufang*, which was made under the Japanese Occupation. The Occupation cinema has been peripherized in the dominant historiography of Chinese film. Focusing on the shifting historical contexts in which *Wanshi liufang* was produced and screened, this paper invites us to rethink the multivalent, ambiguous relations between politics and film culture in an extreme situation.

The Opium War was a major marker in official historiography of modern China. It marked the beginning of the Chinese struggle for nation-building and modernization in response to the menace of imperialist domination. In this historiography, the Qing Imperial Commissioner Lin Zexu (1785-1850) was touted as a national hero for his uncompromised battle to rid China of opium. His burning of three million chests of opium in Humen which he seized from British and other Western merchants became an accumulative act of nationalist defiance that led to the outbreak of the Opium War. For example, in his *China's Destiny*, Chiang Kaishek argued that China's defeat in the Opium War marked "her first national humiliation," giving birth to the "evil influence which the Concessions and consular jurisdiction exerted upon our moral life." On the other hand, Mao Zedong interpreted the Opium War and its subsequent unequal treaties in the Communist narrative as heralding the transformation of China into a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society that remained entrenched until the founding of The People's Republic in 1949.

Yet, paradoxically, the first Chinese filmic representation of the Opium War took place under the Japanese Occupation. It was produced by a Shanghai film studio controlled by the pro-Japanese government of Wang Jingwei. In the nationalist historiography, Wang represented the antipode to Lin Zexu, a "villain of the nation-race," a damned traitor (*hanjian*) who "betrayed his native land by surrendering to the Japanese enemy" (*panguo xiangri*). And his government in Nanjing, which nominally controlled the occupied regions in Central and South China between 1941 and 1945, became a "traitorous clique," a "puppet regime."<sup>i</sup> Actually, throughout its four

years of rule, the Nanjing government sought to demonstrate its nationalist commitment by constructing its own national narrative of China's unification and modernity. Central to this narrative was the Opium War which exemplified the evil of Western imperialism and ushered in a century of humiliation and sufferings in China. China's path to wealth and power, therefore, hinged on its ability to overthrow Western domination. And Commissioner Lin Zexu was a national hero by virtue of his moral courage and political foresight to declare war on opium.

The Wang regime's celebration of the Opium War converged with the ideological agenda of the Japanese army. At the core of the Japanese conception of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere was the narrative of Pan-Asian unity necessitated by their shared sufferings under Anglo-American imperialism which began to invade Asia since China's defeat in the Opium War. And only under the military and economic leadership of Japan could Asians achieve independence and freedom. The Opium War, thus, represented both a justification and rallying cry for the Japanese Pan-Asianism.

It was in this ambiguous space of ideological overlaps and political paradox that the first historical film on the Opium War, *Wanshi liufang* (Eternity), was made in Shanghai. Released in May 1943, *Wanshi liufang* was the first "Greater East Asian film" jointly produced by China, Japan, and Manchukuo. It did well in box-office and its reconstruction of Lin Zexu and his historical world set off powerful reverberations in public spheres all across occupied China. Its overemphasis on entertainment values, the film's pronounced theme of using the Opium War to arouse indignation against "the evils of British imperialism"<sup>iii</sup> won applause from the Japanese army. They praised its political significance, a signal contribution to the "unity of Greater East Asia." By contrast, in the Chinese nationalist historiography, *Wanshi liufang* has become a traitorous film, which "misrepresents Lin Zexu [and] distorts the history of China as a way to oppose the international anti-Fascist Alliance."<sup>iii</sup> Yet, if it was a pro-Japanese propaganda film, how could it be so popular among the occupied subjects who otherwise had no interest in Japanese or Manchukuo films? How did the film construct and visualize the contentious history of the Opium War? What was the politics surrounding the production, marketing, exhibition, and reception of the film? In what ways did Chinese filmmakers wrestle with the ideological and political ambiguity involved in constructing the anti-imperialist past of Lin Zexu on the screen?

My paper focuses on the film *Eternity* to discuss these complex questions in connection to the relationship between state control and popular culture and the ambivalence of cultural production under Occupation. By carefully contextualizing the film, my paper aims to engage with the multiplicity and mutability of its historical meanings.

## I

Japan occupied the foreign concessions of Shanghai in 1941, following the attack of Pearl Harbor. After four months of maneuvering and negotiation, during which Shanghai film studios were allowed to continue production and movie theaters continue their exhibition practices (Hollywood and Chinese films), they enlisted Kawakita Nagamasa to establish a new company devoted to centralize Chinese film production in occupied China south of Beijing. Educated in China and Germany, Kawakita was a liberal film businessman who had built a prominent career in importing French and German films to Japan (as a way of forging cultural exchange between these countries). He had little sympathy for the Japanese militarism and policy of aggression against other Asian nations. Instead, influenced by his father who was killed by the Japanese military police (Kempeitai) for his devotion to the Qing military reform, he envisioned a unity of China and Japan based not on martial domination but on equality and a genuine sense of mutual respect.<sup>iv</sup>

Kawakita became the Vice-President of the new film company, Zhonghua lianhe zhipian gufeng gongsi (China United Productions, or Zhonglian). It consisted of eleven Chinese film studios which was brought together through the efforts of Zhang Shankun, the most dynamic and dominating filmmaker of wartime Shanghai. The several big-budget historical films produced by Zhang between 1938-1940, including *Mulan congjun* (Mulan Joins the Army) and *Diaochan*, which subtly invested patriotic theme in familiar love stories, won him wealth and fame. He chose to stay in the city after Occupation because, in part, he wanted to hold on to his sprawling business interests. Remaining in occupied Shanghai, he sought with all his political skills to accommodate to the new circumstances. Since 1939 Zhang had developed a close friendship with Kawakita from their cooperation (initiated by Kawakita) in providing Chinese films for

Nanjing and other occupied cities (which had until then been inundated with only Japanese and old European films as well as various kinds of local operas and variety shows).<sup>v</sup> Thus he decided to cooperate with Kawakita in reorganizing film production in Shanghai. He was appointed the executive director of Zhonglian, responsible for the day-to-day management--e.g., scripts approval, budget allocation, personnel decisions, and so on.<sup>vi</sup>

Zhonglian was in theory a private enterprise. The eleven Shanghai film studios put in the majority of its initial capital of CRB 3,000,000, and their owners and senior executives took up top positions in Zhonglian. The remaining shares came from Kawakita's Zhonghua and the Manchurian Cinema Association (Manei). Like Manei, Zhonglian was a Japanese national policy (*kokusaku*) company. It was established in Shanghai in 1939 with the aim of expanding the influences of Japanese film propaganda in occupied areas across Central China. Under Kawakita, its vice-president, however, it became mainly a distribution agency, marketing Shanghai-made entertainment films to the occupied areas, while producing shorts and documentaries and sending travelling troupes to show films in surrounding villages as well as the front. After 1942, Zhonghua continued to focus on film distribution, management of theaters (all first-run movie palaces in Shanghai came under its control as "enemy assets,"), propaganda film, and travelling troupes. And it distributed all of Zhonglian products, which was devoted only to the production of feature films.

In the press conference following Zhonglian's inauguration meeting on April 10, Nanjing Propaganda Minister Lin Bosheng urged all Chinese filmmakers in Shanghai to "unite together in unifying national consciousness, promoting traditional culture, serving national policy, and contributing to mass education." By dedicating themselves to the fight for "the rejuvenation of China and the defense of East Asia," Lin continued, they were in effect commencing a "new era of Chinese filmmaking."<sup>vii</sup> Thus, although the Nanjing government did not have direct control of Zhonglian, it sought to determine its production policy by ways of ideological pressure, economic incentive and political control. It promised financial support for film production, and it imposed censorship through the expansion of its Film Censorship Commission (under Ministry of Propaganda) which required all films to be examined for their political and social contents (e.g., no "promotion for Communism" nor "offence to national policy") before exhibition.<sup>viii</sup>

For the Nanjing leadership, like their Japanese overlords, film was an important part of public culture whose purpose was to indoctrinate not to entertain. It ought to serve the interests of the state and thereby the exigencies of political imperatives. This utilitarian view of culture, which allowed no autonomy of artistic and cultural creations, was in fact consistent with the hegemonic discourse of twentieth-century China. "Obsessed" with the autonomy and modernization of the nation-state of China, cultural and political elites alike, from Sun Yatsen and Liang Qichao to Ba Jin and Mao Zedong, identified cultural production with the collective imperatives of social transformation and national rejuvenation. Entertainments became, in this connection, a deviation from the paramount nationalist concern, an indulgence in the private realm of inconsequence, and was therefore denigrated as frivolous, egotistic, vulgar, as well as harmful to the body politic. This discursive tendency was aggravated by the national crisis of Japanese invasion. After the war broke out in 1937, writers and artists, both in occupied and unoccupied territories, joined the states in Chongqing and Yan'an in calling for the politicization of culture: to write, to paint or to act was to serve the cause of anti-Japanese Resistance. As Mao Dun wrote: "The central aim of our myriad forms of artistic and literary creation today was to increase the understanding of the mass public about the meaning of the War of Resistance, and the faith in the ultimate victory [of China]."<sup>ix</sup> The Nationalist system of literary and film censorship in "Free China" and Mao Zedong's exhortation about the "social role" of artists and the "social effects" of their creations in the "Liberated areas" represented, therefore, the increased efforts of the state(s) to police and mobilize culture during the war.<sup>x</sup>

The Wang Jingwei government aspired to pursue exactly the same agenda of cultural mobilization. But lacking experience with cultural works and burdened with the swift takeover of Shanghai after 1941, it found itself both inept and severely underfunded in trying to mobilize culture for the cause of Sino-Japanese "unity" and the Greater East Asian Order. Particularly in film culture, of which few Nanjing leaders had technical knowledge or business experience, as Minister Lin Bosheng acknowledged, the government had no systematic policy to guide the industry. For guidance, it went no further than invoking the nationalist discourse of film as agent of political changes and appealing to such grand ideas as the imperatives to create a Greater East Asian cinema or to promote the spirit of anti-Western nationalism and collectivism among the

occupied subjects.<sup>xi</sup> But the role of China in the East Asian Order as well as the exact meaning of Greater East Asian cinema were never clearly formulated. As Minister Lin acceded, "Chinese cinema has an unprecedentedly glorious and difficult task in fulfilling the policy of the nation-state. But how to effectively make use of it? What is the most effective way to operate it? These are the most pressing problems for us today."<sup>xii</sup>

In addition, recognizing its propaganda values, the Press Bureaus of the Imperial Army and Japanese Consulate in Shanghai also made efforts to mobilize the Occupation cinema. Aside from sponsoring *Zhonghua*, it controlled the supply of filmstocks. For decades Chinese cinema had been dependent on American and German filmstock (Kodak and Agfa) and other shooting equipments. The supplies ceased after the outbreak of the Pacific War; Japan took its place to become the sole supplier of raw films (Fuji). As we shall see, this gave the Japanese a powerful leverage on the film industry. Also, the Military Police terrorized the Chinese film community by constant harassments. Yet, like the Nanjing government, Japan did not seem to have a concrete and consistent approach to perform its policies on cinema war, especially at the early period. It was in this political-ideological context that *Zhonglian* negotiated the ambivalent, constantly shifting situation of its operation.

## II

The occupying power expected the Chinese cinema to become an important part of its propaganda machinery, propagandizing about the unity of all nations in the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere under Japanese guidance and the ultimate victory of Japan in the Pacific War. *Zhonglian* put in its payroll all Shanghai studios and under its contract, with a few exceptions (e.g., Ke Ling and Fei Mu), everybody who was somebody in the profession (notably such major stars as Chen Yunchang, Chen Yanyan, Yuan Meiyun, and Gu Lanjun). Thus the founding of *Zhonglian* was hailed in official media as the "historic day of the commencement of new Chinese cinema, the commencement of Sino-Japanese unity toward the creation of a new East Asian culture."<sup>xiii</sup> Minister Lin Bosheng and many other political dignitaries from Nanjing attended the well-publicized ceremony of *Zhonglian*'s inaugural production on April 12.<sup>xiv</sup>



The relationship between the occupying power and Zhonglian quickly became strained, however. Their conflicts stemmed from the unequivocal emphasis of Zhonglian on entertainment values, a clear deviation from its political mission as "the most powerful weapon" of mass indoctrination.<sup>xv</sup> As a Nanjing critic railed: "At the beginning Zhonglian had attracted a great deal of attention.

Yet in the past year the majority of its products was utterly disappointing... most of them lacked a [political] consciousness that could keep abreast of our times." Instead, Zhonglian should stop churning out romantic fare and "show the world a politically acute and militant attitude."<sup>xvi</sup>

In fact, among the 46 films released between July 1942 and April 1943, except for two or three detective stories and farces, all were romantic dramas mostly with tragic endings. They included Li Pingqian's *Hudie furen* (Madam Butterfly), Yue Feng's *Qing chao* (Currents of Love), Bu Wancang's *Mudan hua xia* (Under the Peony), Tu Guangqi's *Meiniang qu* (The Song of Meiniang), Wang Yin's *Ziyou hun* (Free Spirit), Zheng Xiaoqiu's *Airen* (Lover), He Shaozhang's *Zhulian bihe* (A Perfect Marriage), Zhang Shichuan's *Fufu zhi jian* (Between Husband and Wife), Wen Yimin's *Cimu xin* (The Heart of A Mother), and Yang Xiaozhong's adaption of Ba Jin's *Chun* (Spring) and *Qiu* (Fall). And, contrary to the official discourse of anti-Anglo-American Pan-Asianism, most of these films were conceptually as well as technically inspired by recent Hollywood hits. Actors and actresses also continued to flaunt about their enthrallment with Hollywood glamour. Moreover, these films centered around the familiar theme of human (especially romantic) relationships under the oppression of feudal tradition rather than the official ideas of Sino-Japanese unity or New East Asian Order.

As I discussed elsewhere, most of the Chinese filmmakers in Shanghai were reluctant to partake in the propaganda machinery of the occupying power. In their bifurcate view, it was one thing to make films *for* the entertainment of the occupied subjects as a way of surviving the difficult circumstances, but it was another to submit themselves to the Japanese demands for politicizing the Occupation cinema. The line between propaganda and entertainment, refusal and submission, were often shifting and equivocal. There was however a morally significant boundary (between "this side" and "the other side") which these filmmakers believed they had to

vigilantly observe as well as steadfastly maintain in order, as director Hu Xinlin said, "not to shame ourselves in the eyes of our friends living in exile in the [unoccupied] interior."<sup>xvii</sup> This general sense of refusal to yield to the arbitrary power of the state *overlapped* with the political considerations of the Zhonglian leadership. Zhang Shankun was known to have come into a secret arrangement with the Chongqing government (via the Office of Military Intelligence) to fend the Shanghai cinema, the "Chinese Hollywood," from within against outright control by the Japanese army and its Nanjing "puppets." This entailed what can be called a circuitous tactics of *de-politicization*. This tactics entailed institutionalizing an oppositional way of film practice. In opposition to the Japanese efforts to politicize Occupation culture, to harness all cultural forms into willing service for the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, Chinese cinema would try to produce only films expressedly, even defiantly, aloof from politics. Thus Zhonglian's stress on entertainment values in its production policy, which was readily embraced by the Chinese film community.<sup>xviii</sup> And Zhonglian's privileging of romantic melodrama, particularly tragedies, was precisely because it was apolitical, unreal, and most popular among consumers of urban entertainment in Republican China.

The Nanjing regime and its Japanese overlords were enraged by the lack of political engagement of the Shanghai cinema, its indulgence in such frivolous and vulgar subjects as boy-and-girl romance at a time of life-and-death struggle between "East Asia and Anglo-American imperialism." Cinema in China ought to engage in, not depart from, the serious business of national and inter-national affairs, as senior Nanjing film official Huang Tianzuo argued. It should liberate itself from the evil influences of the "decadent" and "pronographic" Hollywood culture which was devoted to "pure entertainment" in order to constitute a "central part" of the "collectivistic culture of China and Greater East Asia."<sup>xix</sup> In other words, Zhonglian remained shamelessly in servitude to Anglo-American cultural imperialism.

However, Zhonglian was able to continue with its devotion to entertainment values policy as a result of several interlocking historical forces. Kawakita Nagamasa, who had little affinities with the militarism in Japan and the sense of racial superiority among the Imperial Army in occupied areas, respected the artistic and administrative autonomy of Zhang Shankun. Under their joint tutelage, the Chinese production staff at Zhonglian was shielded largely from direct

Japanese manipulation.<sup>xx</sup> Moreover, Zhonglian leadership's invocation of "box-office concern" (*shengyi yan*) to justify their policy of entertainment values made uncontested sense in an economy ravaged by uncontrollable inflation and the Nanjing government was unable to subsidize film production as it had promised. Operating with a tight budget and without special fundings, as veteran directors Zhu Shilin and Bu Wancang argued, Zhonglian was compelled to make only films that would make money and "the more tragic a film was and the more tears it could bring out from the audience, the most successful in box-office it would become." Thus this "disappointed state" of Occupation cinema.<sup>xxi</sup> And, ironically, although the occupying state was exasperated by the depoliticization of Zhonglian films, it recognized that they at least provided amusements and relaxations which were necessary to keep the occupied subjects contented and physically sound (as a labor force).<sup>xxii</sup>

### III

Beginning in 1943, there was an obvious intensification of efforts to politicize Shanghai cinema as Nanjing joined Japan in declaring war against the Allies on January 9. Occupied China was now a partner "sharing joys and pains together" (*tonggan gongku*, as Wang Jingwei terms it) with Japan in the Greater East Asian War. To help win the total war on the cultural front, the Nanjing government banned screening of Hollywood films in Shanghai (while the ban had been in effect in all other occupied cities since December 1941) and, further, increased pressures on turning Zhonglian into a propaganda machine. The occupying power claimed that since China had been dominated by Western imperialism for a century, its culture, as exemplified by the colonial ethos and decadence of Shanghai, was but a "gramophone of Anglo-American culture."<sup>xxiii</sup> It was therefore imperative to focus propaganda on exposing the evil and savagery of Anglo-American colonialism to the Chinese public in order to mobilize them to fight for the liberation of Greater East Asia.<sup>xxiv</sup> Particularly cinema, that most "effective medium of mass indoctrination," ought to portray in "particularly provocative images" all the "sins" and "pillages" of Anglo-American imperialists in China.<sup>xxv</sup>

And 1943 happened to be the 100th Anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing which ended the Opium War. The Nanjing government organized mass rallies and various other commemorative activities across the occupied regions to pledge to help win the Greater East Asian War by liberating the Chinese heart and mind from a century of spiritual pollution of Anglo-American cultural imperialism (from journalism and education to cinema).<sup>xxvi</sup> Nanjing demanded Zhonglian participate in the propaganda campaign by completing its project on the Opium War. In fact, one of the six opening films Zhonglian announced when it was founded included *Yapian zhanzheng (Opium War)*, which, according to screenwriter Ye Yifang, was originally commissioned by the Japanese army.<sup>xxvii</sup> But Zhonglian put off the production and explained the postponement in terms of schedule conflicts and lack of funding.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The delay was in fact a tactic of artful refusal. Chinese filmmakers were ambivalent about making a film of the Opium War. This ambivalence came to the fore only with a contextualization of the complexity of Chinese experience with imperialism in the twentieth century. As is well-known, since at least 1924, both the Nationalists and Communists imagined the Chinese community through the ideological sieve of anti-imperialist nationalism. And Western imperialism had often been constructed by Chinese opinion leaders as at once a source of national humiliation and an agent of modernization requisite for national rejuvenation. In the cinema industry, specifically, Hollywood was at once idolized for its culture of glamour and technical superiority and abhorred for its predominance in the local film market and the racism of its portrayal of Chinese.<sup>xxix</sup> Thus Chinese filmmakers in Republican Shanghai were painfully conscious of the "sins" and "pillages" of Anglo-American imperialism. Yet, during the Anti-Japanese War, to condemn the imperialist abuses of the West would, paradoxically, mean only to condone and *legitimize* the militaristic aggression of Japanese imperialism (which claimed to invade China only to liberate it from Western imperialism). It would mean also to *de-legitimize* the rule of Nationalist party-state in "Free China," because it was in alliance with the Americans and British in the War of Resistance against global Fascism. Insofar as the Shanghai film community identified with the anti-Japanese agenda of the Chongqing government, condemning Anglo-American imperialism would thus be tantamount to cultural treason: betraying one's country by aiding the enemy through propaganda.<sup>xxx</sup>

Hence, Zhonglian filmmakers were reluctant to launch *Yapian zhanzheng*. By late 1942, however, pressures from the occupying power became so intense that Kawakita and Zhang felt unable to hold out any longer. For example, there was widespread rumor that the Kwantung Army in Manchukuo wanted to kill Kawakita so that the entire Japanese-sponsored film apparatus in the mainland could be unified under Manei to serve the interests of the New East Asian Order.<sup>xxxix</sup> And Nanjing put out a special fund for the production of the anti-Anglo-American propaganda film.<sup>xxxix</sup> On top of this, the Press Bureau of the Imperial Army threatened to cut its supply of filmstock by half (from six films to three).<sup>xxxix</sup> So how to make a film on the Opium War without legitimizing the Japanese aggression? It was within this severely constrained space of cultural production that the tactics of depoliticizing Occupation cinema acted out most dramatically.

The film was originally designed as a big-budget historical epic jointly produced by Zhonghua, Zhongdian, and Manei, as a demonstration of the "unity of the Greater East Asian cinema" in China. In contrast to the average production cost of CRB 3000,000 approximately,<sup>1</sup> this one was set at 1 million.<sup>xxxix</sup> Besides the huge budget, however, everything changed when the shooting began in Shanghai in October 21, 1943. First, the joint production became more in name than in practice when Manei's role was limited to sending its superstar, Li Xianglan (Yamaguchi Yoshiko), to Shanghai, and Zhonghua remained focused on distribution. The entire process of production--from scriptwriting to casting--was under Zhonglian's command. Second, the leading cast of the film was expanded from two, Gao Zhanfei and Yuan Meiyun, to five, also Chen Yunchang, Li Xianglan, and Wang Yin. While Gao's role of Commissioner Lin Zexu was unchanged, the expanded cast, all superstars themselves, made it possible for a recentering of the narrative structure. And the directors were also expanded from Maxu Weibang to include Bu Wancang, Yang Xiaozhong, Zhu Shilin and Zhang Shankun, well-known for their sensitive treatment of historical drama and romantic subjects. Third, the film title was changed from the historically specific *Yapian zhanzheng* to the semantically ambiguous *Wanshi liufang*, a cliché phrase that could be applied to a multitude of temporal-spatial situations.

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1 Hua de, 'Yu ce wangshi liufang zhuanqian yibaiwanyuan' (I predict Wanshi liufang can get one million in box-office), May 7, 1943, *Zhonghua ribao*.

The dominant view in nationalist historiography sees *Wanshi liufang* as yet another traitorous film of Zhonglian. As Cheng Jihua argues: "it makes use of the nationalist feeling of Chinese people by pretending to eradicate all the evils of Anglo-American aggression. Actually, it distorts the history of the Opium War, permeated with anti-historicist views, and it shamelessly piles up on triangular love."<sup>xxxv</sup> A careful reading of the film reveals that this view is partly correct, as *Wanshi liufang* is in fact about a romantic triangle, but it is precisely this centering on a romantic theme that cancels out its "pretense" of highlighting the "evils of Anglo-American aggression." To put it differently, Zhonglian filmmakers refused to participate in the legitimizing discourse of the occupying power by seeking to *depoliticize* the history of Opium War in *Wanshi liufang*.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Walter Benjamin has discussed rewriting the past as a way to resist the "danger" of complicity with the official ideology, of "becoming a tool of the ruling class."<sup>xxxvii</sup> This "moment of danger" was particularly imminent and urgent under foreign Occupation as the pressure for treason and self-betrayal was tremendous. *Wanshi liufang* was in fact an effort of the occupied filmmakers to reconstruct the historical memories in a way that was subtly different from, and therefore craftily subversive against the official orthodoxy. Its unofficial position was insinuated in a passage before the opening credit, part of which reads: "[this film] gathers materials from informal biographies and familiar stories." It is, in other words, an unofficial, popular narration of the life of Lin Zexu, rather than a dramatic elaboration of the official ideology of anti-Anglo-American imperialism.

In fact, *Wanshi liufang* is basically a romantic tragedy set in a period of historical significance. Similar to many Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies stories and dramas popular at the time, its focus is on the young talented scholar Lin Zexu (before his anti-opium crusade) and his romantic relationship with two virtuous beauties. The film opens with an elaborated sequence of gorgeous traditional architectures, which sets the tone for the film by evoking in its audience a sense of national identity. The next scene shows streets lined with opium dens and evil-looking drug dealers, and in this midst Lin Zexu (Gao Zhanfei) is introduced as a young scholar of lofty ideals and talents, set out to reform China. As he declares: "foreigners are now openly selling opium, luring people into addiction, poisoning Chinese citizens with opium and sucking away all

of China's money. This lays the root for the collapse of China as a nation-race... The evil effects of opium penetrate into the depth of our society. It will be too dangerous if we don't try to eradicate opium now." He is invited to stay with a governor, who is impressed by his moral idealism, so that he can devote himself to studying for the examination. He falls in love with the governor's daughter, Zhang Jingxian (Chen Yunchang). She adores the young scholar's Confucian learning and commitment against opium. But parental intervention forces Zhang to act improperly to Lin, who sees her violation of propriety an affront to his sense of uprightness. And even when the governor explained it is his fault, Lin insists on ending the romantic relationship and leaves. Ashamed, Zhang vows to remain chaste all her life. This sequence, rapidly cut between Lin invoking Confucian principles and the devastated Zhang in close-up, shows Lin in an unfavorable light; he seems to be more concerned with his own reputation and the integrity of the Confucian culture than with the feeling and fate of the woman who devotes herself to him.

This summary, I hope, demonstrates the affinity between the narrative strategy of *Wanshi liufang* and other popular literary genres such as *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies* literature. Not only are they equally centered on unfulfilled love between scholars and beauties, but they also, as Rey Chow discusses in another context, we will discuss further, derive their dramatic potency from the lone struggle of the woman character against the hostile world and from her sacrifice at the end. It is, also, the female body that provides the battleground of contesting ideologies. But whereas *Butterflies* stories often highlight the cultural tension between modernity and tradition, *Wanshi liufang*, because of the wartime exigencies, brings to focus the political issues of nationalism and loyalty.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

After leaving Zhang Jingxian, Lin takes abode with another official whose daughter, the quiet, virtuous Zheng Yuping (Yuan Meiyun), takes a fancy to the idealistic scholar. They soon marry and Lin begins to move up the ladder of success after passing one examination after another. Meanwhile, Zhang has lost her father to illness and her brother to opium addiction. Impoverished, lonely, yet remaining chaste to the memory of Lin, she decides to take up his cause by devoting her life to invent an anti-opium drug. The contrast between Zhang's desolation and Lin's happiness invites, again, an unfavorable view of the future national hero. If he were

more humane and loving to his first lover, would Zhang suffer what she is suffering now? To the audiences, then, this dramatization of the "private" life of Lin ineluctably casts different lights on his "public" career.

The film then moves on to another love story. This subplot revolves around Fenggu (Li Xianglan), who sings for living at an opium den. The two British owners (played by Yan Jun and Mon Na) are supposed, as appear in the script, to represent the savagery and maliciousness of Anglo-American imperialism in China. Yet the effects on the screen are totally different. The portrayal of the two actors are so exaggerated that, for example, their Pinocchio-like noses and shrilling voices invite laughters and mockeries from the audience. They become, in short, objects of ridicule not hatred.<sup>xxxix</sup> In the opium den, which is clean, fancy, and tastefully decorated, Fenggu falls in love with Pan Daniao (Wang Yin), who was a promising scholar before becoming addicting to opium. Desperately trying to help her lover, she sings, in close-up, *Mai tang ge*, or *Come Buy Candies* (which became an instant hit across China) inside the opium den to urge addicts to quit smoking if they want to remain "human." The two opium den owners threaten to kill her. Pan comes out to defend Fenggu, all the while shouting "I am not afraid of foreigners!" After their escape from the scene, Pan vows to get rid of his addiction with Fenggu's help.

*Wanshi liufang* reaches climax when Lin Zexu reappears on the screen. He is now the Qing Imperial Commissioner, mature (with a moustache) and dignified, specially charged with ridding China of opium once and for all. To help his cause, apparently suppressing her own jealousy, his wife Zheng Yuping has arranged to move Zhang Jingxian's medicinal work to a nunnery nearby. And only now does Lin realize, in a typically melodramatic way, the inventor of the anti-opium drug is actually his former lover; he sighs with a mix of regret and guilt: "I squander the best of her time."

Lin Zexu's anti-opium campaign meets with resistance. In a meeting with the British, despite his enormous moral authority, which is visually underlined by always placing Lin at the center of the screen flanked by short, silly-looking British merchants, his plan of cooperation on opium prohibition fails. The Opium War starts afterwards. Significantly, however, the War is visually the most *insignificant* part of the film. There seems to have been a conscious effort



involved in downplaying the dramatic, therefore political, effects of the Opium War. Besides a brief scene in which two presumably British gunboats approach from a distance the Humen fortress and one of which is hit by the defenders, the whole war is represented symbolically on a map, indicating the movement of the British navy toward Nanjing, and, its defeat, the text of the Treaty of Nanjing. It then fades into a more engaging (and "realistic") sequence that involves Zhang Jingxian leading a popular group, the Ping Ying tuan (Eliminating British Troupe), defending Guangzhou against the intruders. Zhang is killed. Before her death she asks her maid to give a handkerchief (soaked with her blood) to Lin as well as a message: "I hope every Chinese is dedicated [to the country]. I am happy...I have done my best."

China is defeated and Lin Zexu is exiled to Xinjiang. Before his departure, Lin and his wife pays homage to Zhang at a local cemetery. Inside, the maid hands him the handkerchief. The camera follows Lin, filled with grief and regrets, to the front gate of the cemetery and pans up to a close-up of the four characters on it that read: *Wanshi liufang*. The film then ends with an image of Zhang Jingxian smiling in peace and satisfaction superimposed on the upper left corner of the four characters.

As several critics pointed out, who actually is eternalized in modern Chinese history? Is it Zhang Jingxian or Lin Zexu the true hero(ine) in *Wanshi liufang*?<sup>xl</sup> This ambiguous ending brings to focus the tactics of depoliticization of the occupied cinema. As discussed above, Lin Zexu does not appear for the most part of the film, and for the most part of his screen appearance he is a young literati romantically involved with two virtuous women. The narrative space for his involvement and leadership in the anti-opium campaign is significantly limited, while the Opium War is visually and narratively a marginal part of his biography. Thus, instead of dramatizing the *public* events of Lin, as the official ideology did, *Wanshi liufang* highlights the unofficial history of his *private* agony. As a Nanjing ideologue complained, "I am very disappointed. The Lin Zexu in the film is a fictionalized one, not the *real* Lin Zexu who was the Guangdong and Guangxi Viceroy at the time... At a critical time of external invasion, [Lin] was preoccupied by so many pressing matters. How can we impose on him an *unreal* romance which pained and agonized him so much...How can the scriptwriter allow himself to distort history for the sake of profit?"<sup>xli</sup>

Lin's private history is, of course, intimately interwoven with the stories of Zheng Yuping and especially Zhang Jingxian. In fact, in contrast to the limited narrative space given to Lin, *Wanshi liufang* focuses on the struggle and suffering of its woman character. It is Zhang Jingxian who carries the actual weight of the film. The result was a romantic tragedy similar in thematic focus and narrative structure to many popular cultural forms of the time (mainly Butterfly fiction and local opera). The familiar theme of Zhang's tragic struggle to suppress her desires in order to stay chaste to the man who in effect abandons her in the name of Confucian principles made *Wanshi liufang* a box-office success. But it also invited an alternative view of Lin Zexu. If he could be more loving and humane to women, would Zhang have to suffer all her sufferings and suffer alone? Indeed, Zhang's fearless commitment to and ultimate sacrifice in the war against opium was not a result of anti-Western imperialism, but of a displacement of her lost love and fidelity to Lin. Thus in her death, chastity and loyalty symbolically conflated; and this conflation constituted the thematic focus of *Wanshi liufang*.

By placing Zhang Jingxian at the center of the film, who (not Lin Zexu) achieves eternity in her self-sacrifice for the sake of love and chastity, Zhonglian filmmakers made a romantic tragedy out of the politically volatile subject of the Opium War. This alternative approach to history subtly *deemphasized* the anti British imperialism highlighted in the official interpretation of the Opium War yet, interestingly, without *deemphasizing* the evils of opium and imperialist invasion. In fact, *Wanshi liufang* was a romantic drama subtly imbued with a nationalist message.

In her memoir, Li Xianglan calls *Wanshi liufang* a "film of chimera-like content of which people of different political dispositions would come up with different interpretations." She goes on to argue that "to the Japanese authorities, this was an anti-British film, but for the Chinese people it was a subversive film about resistance against foreign invasion."<sup>xlii</sup> This testimony is borne out by a reading of contemporary reviews by Japanese as well as pro-Nanjing Chinese critics, who invariably praised the film for its "exposition to the East Asian people" the "malignity of Anglo-American imperialism."<sup>xliii</sup> The Chinese audiences, however, seemed to understand *Wanshi liufang* in a different way. According to a report, when the audiences heard

Lin Zexu tell his admirers before he leaves Guangdong, "China will never be conquered," they exploded in cheers and applause.<sup>xliv</sup> In fact, the film artfully made use of the official anti-opium, anti-British rhetoric to condemn the Japanese invasion of China. As director Hu Xinling remembers, the audiences were quick to identify the "foreigners" (*yangren*) behind the rampant opium problem and the conspiracy to "poison the Chinese people" as the Japanese (*dong yangren*, or the Eastern foreigners), not the British.

It was indeed public knowledge in occupied China that the Japanese army and their Chinese puppets were in control of the opium supply in their territories. And they used the profits of the drug trade to finance their war machinery. Opium dens big and small, fancy and simple ( many also doubled as brothels), were a part of the urban landscape in occupied areas. In Nanjing, for example, there were about 1,000 opium dens serving a clientele ranging from old men and women to teenagers, and, in Shanghai, as Chen Chunren testifies, "it was much more easy and convenient to buy opium than to buy rice," which resulted in the devastation of numerous lives and families by addiction.<sup>xlv</sup> Thus the theme of anti-British imperialism in *Wanshi liufang* became, to the Chinese public, that of anti-Japanese imperialist invasion. Thus, when Lin Zexu, Zhang Jingxian, and Zheng Yuping denounces on the screen the debilitating and deleterious effects of the drug on the Chinese people, the audiences saw them as "using the past to criticize the present" (*yi gu feng jin*), a feigned political critique that gave voices to their rage and bitterness against the Occupation. The film, in fact, enhanced this alternative reading by visually decontextualizing the Opium War. For example, as discussed above, all drug dealers and pushers in the film except the two British opium den owners were Chinese (or possibly Japanese as well). The war scenes were short, symbolically reconstructed, and devoid of any sense of moral urgency and historical dramatization. And there was not even one British soldier appearing on the screen to provide a point of historical identification. Thus, for the Chinese public, the official theme of anti-British imperialism of *Wanshi liufang* was turned into an alternative articulation of anti-Japanese nationalism.

In sum, *Wanshi liufang* demonstrated the craft and ingenuity of the occupied filmmakers in their struggle to create and maintain an alternative space of cultural production both within and outside the Japanese propaganda machinery. By skillfully deploying the language of popular

entertainment cinema to de-politicize and decontextualize the Opium War, they succeeded in avoiding legitimizing the Occupation in China.

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- i. See Wang Xiu and Guo Dehong, *Zhonghua minzu kangri zhanzhang shi* (The War History of the Chinese Nation), Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1995).
  - ii. See advertisements for *Wanshi liufang*, *Zhong bao*, May 13, 1943.
  - iii. Zhu Tianwei, "Youhao haishi qinlue" (Friendship or Aggression), *Dianying yishu*, v.4 (April 1995), p.22.
  - iv. Kawakita Nagamasa, *My Recollections*, trans. by Bill Kikuko and Asa Ireton, Private Publication 1988, pp.1-12. For an analysis of Kawakita's family background and political vision, see Poshek Fu, "The Ambiguity of Entertainment: Chinese Cinema in Japanese-Occupied Shanghai, 1937-1941," *Cinema Journal* 37:1 (Fall 1997).
  - v. Kawakita Nagamasa, *My Recollections*, pp.24-5. For pre-1939 entertainment in occupied areas, see advertisements in *Nanjing xinbao*, January 1-March 12, 1938 and January 1-February 1, 1939.
  - vi. Zhang Shankun, "Wo de hua" (My Words), *Xin yingtan* 2:6 (May 1944), p.19.
  - vii. *Zhong bao*, April 11, 1941, p.2; see also April 4, 1942, p.2.
  - viii. *Wangwei zhengfu xinzheng yuan huiyi lu* (The Puppet Wang Regime Executive Yuan Meetings), Beijing: Dangan chubanshe, 1992, v.13 pp.187-94; and v.8 pp.424-427.
  - ix. "Lun jiaqiang piping gongzuo" (On Strengthening Critical Work), quoted from Lan Hai, *Zhongguo kangzhan wenyi shi*, Jinan: Shandong wenyi chubanshe, 1984, p.332.
  - x. For discussions of the wartime arts and culture, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Literary Trends: The Road to Revolution, 1927-1949," in Jaohn King Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker eds, *The Cambridge History of China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, v.13, pt.2.; Edward Gunn, "Literature and Art of the War Period," in James Hsiung and S. Levine eds., *China's Bitter Victory: The War with Japan*, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1992, pp.235-273; and Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China 1937-1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
  - xi. For a subtle insider's critique of the Nanjing regime's film policy, see Xu Gongmei, "Da Dongya zhanzheng xia de dianying zhengce ji qi chuangzuo" (Cinema Policy and Its Creation under The Greater East Asian War), *Huawen Daban meiri* 9:11 (December 1942), pp.2-10.
  - xii. Qu Shao, "Lin Bosheng xiansheng fangwen ji" (Interview with Mr. Lin Bosheng), *Xin yingtan*, 3 (January 1943), p.15.
  - xiii. Takahara Tomijiro, "Shanghai sinsheng dianying jie fangwen" (Interviews with the Reborn Shanghai Cinema), *Dianying huabao*, 6:4 (April 1942), pp.46-47. Also *Xianggang ribao*, June 11, 1942, p.4; *Xinshen bao*, April 11-12, 1942.
  - xiv. *Zhong bao*, April 13, 1942, p.2.
  - xv. "Duanyan" (Editorial), *Xin yingtan* n.2 (December 1942), p.15.
  - xvi. Chuncan, "Shiwang yu xiwang" (Disappointment and Hope), *Zhong bao*, August 15, 1943, p.4.
  - xvii. *Dianying suiyue zongheng tan* (Cinematic Experiences: Oral Interviews), Taipei: Guojia dianying zhiliaoguan, 1994, pp.308-9.
  - xviii. Ibid. Also Personal Interview with Hu Xinling, August 17, 1997, Taipei.
  - xix. Huang Tianzuo, "Zhongguo dianying wenhua jianshe yundong" (The Movement to Construct Chinese Film Culture), *Xin yingtan*, n.3 (January 1943), pp.17-18.
  - xx. See Akira Shimizu, *Shanghai sokai eiga watakushi shi* (A Personal History of Shanghai Foreign Concession Cinema), Tokyo: Shinco-sha, 1995, pp.85-92 and 188-98; Hisakazu Tsuji, *Chuka denin shiwa 1939-1945* (An Informal History of Chinese cinema), Tokyo: Gaifu-sha, 1987, pp.1-39, 202-37; Personal interviews with Hu Xinling, August 17, 1997, Taipei, and with Tong Yuejuan, April 5, 1993, Hong Kong; and Gongsun Lu, *Zhongguo dianying shi hua* (An Informal History of Chinese Cinema), Hong Kong: Nantian shuye, 1962, v.2, pp.148-50.

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- xxi. "Yujia nu zuotan" (A Roundtable Discussion on Fishing Girl), *Xin yingtan*, v.7 (May 1943), pp.22-25; "Yu Zhu Shilin xiansheng duitan" (A Conversation with Mr. Zhu Shilin), *Xin yingtan*, n.6 (April 1943), p.31.
- xxii. Editorial, *Zhong bao*, December 24, 1943, p.1.
- xxiii. Quotations from Editorial, *Zhong bao*, June 11, 1943, p.1 and the speeches by Lin Bosheng to an anti-Anglo-American rally, *Xinshen bao*, February 16, 1943, p.2 and the speech by Shanghai mayor Chen Gongbo, *Xinshen bao*, January 10, 1943, p.3.
- xxiv. See *Zhanshi xuanquan zhengce jibeng gangyao* (An Outline of Wartime Cultural Propaganda Policy), *Zhong bao*, June 12, 1943, pt.2.
- xxv. Xu Gongmei, "Da Dongya zhanzheng xia de dianying zhengce ji qi chuangzao," p.10.
- xxvi. Editorials, *Zhong bao*, January 2, 1943 and June 11, 1943.
- xxvii. Personal interview with Ye Yifang, August 1997, Hong Kong. For the announcements of the original six opening films, see *Zhong bao*, April 13, 1942, p.2.
- xxviii. "Yapian zhi zhan huan pai" (Postponement of the Production of The Opium War), *Dianying huabao*, n.8 (August 1942), p.43.
- xxix. The complex reaction of the Chinese film community to Hollywood and its influence in China is an area crying for systematic research. For some newspaper accounts, see *Shen bao*, March 19, 1939, p.15; November 11, 1939, p.16; *Zhong bao*, November 2, 1940, p.4.
- xxx. Personal Interviews with Ye Yifang, June 28, 1997, Hong Kong, and with Hu Xinling, August 17, 1997, Taipei.
- xxxi. Shimizu Akira, *Shanghai sokai eiga watakushi shi*, pp.94-97.
- xxxii. See He Xiujun, "Zhang Shichuan he Mingxing gongsi" (Zhang Sichuan and Mingxi Film Company), *Wenshi zhiliao xuanji*, v.69 (March 1980), p.260-61.
- xxxiii. Qu Shanzhao, "Jiejue zhi dao" (The Key to Solution), *Xin yingtan*, n.6 (April 1943), p.15.
- xxxiv. Ibid.
- xxxv. Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fanzhan shi* (A History of Chinese Cinema), Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1980, v.2 p.117. See also Zhu Jian and Wang Chaoguang, *Mingguo yingtan* (Republican Cinema), Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997, pp.332-33.
- xxxvi. I am most grateful to Lau Yiu-kuen for giving me access to *Wanshi liufang* and to Zhiwei Xiao for giving me the text of the film.
- xxxvii. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p.255.
- xxxviii. Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The politics of Reading Between West and East*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- xxxix. See a review to this effect in "Wanshi liufang bitan ji," (Discussion of Eternity), *Zhong bao*, May 16, 1943, p.4.
- xl. "Wanshi liufang bitan ji."
- xli. Jiang Shan, "Jiu lishi guangdian tan Lin Zexu yu Yapian zhi yi" (Lin Zexu and the Opium War from a Historical Perspective), *Zhong bao*, May 20, 1943.
- xlii. Li Xianglan, *Zai Zhongguo de rizi* (My Life in China), Hong Kong: Baixing wenhua, 1992, p.223.
- xliii. See, for example, "Dui Zhongguo dianying de yinxiang" (Impressions of Chinese Cinema: A Roundtable Discussion), *Huawen meiri*, n.133 (September 1944), pp.10-12.
- xliv. "Wanshi liufang bitan ji."
- xlv. Chen Chunren, *Kangzhan shidai shenghuo shi* (Wartime Life), Hong Kong: Changxing shuju, 1979, p.168. For Nanjing, see *Zhong bao*, July 30, 1944, p.3.