

# 香港早期電影遊蹤

TRANSCENDING SPACE AND TIME  
~EARLY CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE OF HONG KONG~



第三冊 被遺忘的影壇女先鋒 及 大觀公司的越洋製作

BOOK III RE-DISCOVERING PIONEERING FEMALES  
IN EARLY CHINESE CINEMA &  
GRANDVIEW'S CROSS-BORDER PRODUCTIONS

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# 前言

Foreword

香港電影資料館於2014年1月至3月舉辦「香港早期電影遊蹤」影展，除了令本館收藏的影像瑰寶得以曝光之外，更重要的是希望透過對這些影像的深化閱讀，今昔互動，鑑古知今，這是我們愛談「回憶」和「歷史」的當下不可或缺的。

「香港早期電影遊蹤」設四個放映主題，第一部份集中放映早期的紀錄片，第二部份是電影先驅侯曜的小型電影回顧，第三部份主要是追溯被遺忘的早期電影女中豪傑，第四部份為香港大觀公司1939至48年間避走美國時在彼邦拍攝的電影。

除放映外亦會輔以講座和映後談，並以電子書的方式出版這三冊節目特刊。

在此特別鳴謝前輩羅卡、研究者法蘭賓、荷蘭攝影界前輩米高羅格、捐贈者黎錫、研究者劉嶽、借出新作《金門銀光夢》（2013）的魏時煜導演、借出《關武帝》（1916）電影拷貝的曾奕田、該電影創作者Violet Wong的後人余競存和電子書的執行編輯陳志華等。



“Transcending Space and Time” series curated by the Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA) from January to March 2014 showcases some of the HKFA's most valued treasures, and also intends to create an interaction between the past and the present through closer analysis of these images. After all, learning from the past is an important part of any discussion of memory and history.

“Transcending Space and Time” series is comprised of four major focuses: 1) Cityscape in early moving images; 2) A retrospective on pioneering filmmaker Hou Yao; 3) A commemoration of forgotten female filmmakers from the early years; and 4) Films produced by Hong Kong's Grandview Film Company after it shifted productions to the United States between 1939-1948. In addition to screenings, the series also includes, post-screening discussions and these three electronic publications.

The HKFA would like to thank veteran film historian Law Kar, film scholar Frank Bren, donor Lai Shek, cinematographer Michael Rogge, researcher Lau Yam, Dr S. Louisa Wei (for providing a copy of her latest film *Golden Gate Girls*, 2013), Arthur Dong (for providing a copy of *The Curse of Quon Gwon*, 1916), Professor Gregory Yee Mark (Grandson of *The Curse of Quon Gwon*'s female lead, Violet Wong) and Ernest Chan (Executive editor of our digital publications).

# 伍錦霞

## ——電影霞光<sup>1</sup>

—— 法蘭賓

美國華裔導演伍錦霞是早期華語片兩個令人印象極其難忘的女電影工作者之一。<sup>2</sup>

她和父母都出生於舊金山（即三藩市），但祖先故鄉在中國廣東省台山縣。像許多華裔美國人一樣，東西方的雙重根源造就了她的人生，也影響了她身為導演所拍攝的故事。

據近期研究顯示，至少有她三部香港電影劇本的副本，存於紐約州首府奧爾巴尼的紐約州資料館。雖然紐約自1921年起實施電影審查制度，但到1965年美國最高法院介入，推翻了馬里蘭州禁映一部丹麥電影的決議時，這制度開始岌岌可危。紐約當局眼見勢色不對，馬上取締了州內的電檢制度，同年9月30日生效。<sup>3</sup>

結果呢？紐約州資料館保存了直至1965年為止，幾近55,000部美國製作的有聲電影對話劇本，以及所有要在紐約州發行的國內或「外國」電影的「外文」對話劇本（有時附帶合

格的英文翻譯)。出奇的是，「香港」在外國片門類中佔有名額最多的2,454部，超過了墨西哥的2,348部、英國的1,970部，等等。這些劇本，按1965年之前紐約州的審查要求，是專門送交檢驗及審批的，不得退回。因此，在電影史家看來，奧爾巴尼藏有豐富的創作者資料，甚至連那些因拷貝不足無法放映而「失傳」的電影，也可從中找到有關導演的資料。

伍錦霞和與她旗鼓相當的早期華語片女導演尹海靈（參考本書152-187頁），她們的影片都屬上列被送驗而得保存劇本之列。

本文旨在探討伍錦霞的個人成長，尤其是她早年在香港，即1936年6月4日抵埗後在電影界磨練的日子。那時她才21歲，雖未執導演筒，卻剛與別人一起監製了一部荷里活劇情片。她頭上這個「荷里活製片家」的光環，照着她在香港推開了許多扇大門，補足了她的過人膽色和天賦才華。她本擬一直留在香港發展，只因中日戰爭進入第三年，戰火蔓延至香港，父母不肯讓她留下，才於1939年10月9日離開香港。





圖一 伍錦霞（第二排，左五）與《心恨》（1935）工作人員合影。

Fig 1 Esther Eng (second row, fifth from left) with the crew members of *Sum Hun* aka *Heartache/s* (1935).

而在留港期間，伍錦霞參與了香港電影第一個「黃金時代」。<sup>4</sup>

雖然她離開香港時只有25歲，從1938年底至1939年初也有幾週病魔纏身，但是她的電影事業看起來很健康，作品包括五部自導或合導的影片，還有她於1935到1936年間擔任執行監製的荷里活電影《心恨》（美國，1936）。年僅25歲的她已經是個「全面」電影人，多少身兼導演、監製、編劇及發行商之責，本應預示着她日後在美國開創出成功生涯。

誰不知，不到十年，她就放棄了電影，再十年後，卻成了另一領域的璀璨之星，被人與大明星馬龍白蘭度、安娜夢茵兒一視同仁——不過此刻她的身份是曼哈頓炙手可熱的餐館老闆娘！

### 揚名曼哈頓

「田納西威廉斯、馬龍白蘭度，夢茵兒和其他名人，經常聚腳於第58街和第2街伍錦霞開的中餐館內。伍錦霞在中國拍過電影……」

——沃爾特溫切爾，1959年9月14日<sup>5</sup>

媒體八卦之王溫切爾替伍錦霞畫龍點睛，「其他名人」及其公關人馬，恨不得也能戴上這頂高帽。

然而，同是1959年，享譽北美電影史的攝影大師黃宗霽對他的好友伍錦霞，更能賞識於微時。也許他是有心人，總之一有機會，他就向演藝界的朋友推薦伍錦霞的餐館。<sup>6</sup> 1935年，他曾指導伍錦霞學習電影技術，當時她只有21歲，有人說她像個小男生，一個孩子氣的荷里活製片人，竟打算開拍粵語片，推向國際華人市場和美國主流社會。

這兩點她差點做到了。

但是，二十世紀五十年代，她的電影舞台之光開始暗淡，反而漸漸成了曼哈頓受人矚目的餐館老闆娘，甚至連《紐約時報》後來也讚揚她是一位「身高五英尺的女強人」，1950年

「從她的家鄉舊金山」席捲而來，到了紐約，「與唐人街餐廳互相包容納，彼此互惠。」同一篇報導說：「伍小姐身後有近乎傳奇的職業生涯，她是華語片的跨國製片人、導演和發行商。」<sup>7</sup>

往後的電影史編纂把伍錦霞的功業拋到九霄雲外，本文正是從伍錦霞的事業高峰，回溯她早年如何平地一聲雷，成為電影界敢作敢為的女中怪傑！

## 錦霞初現

### 傳世意義

下文將概括交代伍錦霞早期的職業生涯，現在先指出她對世界影壇的重要意義，這是寫作本文的目的，儘管她的所有作品幾乎都已「遺佚」，只剩下最近發現的那些劇本。

她第一部擔任執行監製的劇情片《心恨》（美國，1936）和她導演的處女作《民族女英雄》（香港，1937），都是「國防」電影中的粵語片。這種富有中國特色的電影類型，既講故事提供大眾娛樂，也說道理提高民眾意識，希望中國國內外的所有華人，勇敢面對日本不斷侵略祖國的嚴峻事實，尤其是在兩件翻天覆地的大事發生之後。先是日本在1931年9月18日「九一八事變」後攻佔滿洲，<sup>8</sup> 未幾，日軍又於1932年1





圖二 「伍錦霞（左二）帶領一群聰穎的女鼓手，在昨天的寶塔節巡遊穿過唐人街，成千上萬的華人兒童參與慶祝」<sup>11</sup>

Fig.2 "Esther Ng leading a group of clever drummer girls in the Pagoda Festival Parade through Chinatown last night, in which thousands of Chinese children took part in." (Esther is second from the right.)

月28日入侵上海，其可怕後果，就是今天我們說的「淞滬之戰」，也就是《心恨》裏面的情節點；但我們不要忘記，更早的「九一八事變」，才是二次世界大戰的真正起點。<sup>9</sup>

伍錦霞拍攝的另一類電影《女人世界》，在1939年2月1日香港首映後，其意義已日見重要。影片由她與魯司共同編導。情節結構精密，講述的是當代香港的故事，36名演員清一色全女班，令人驚訝！影片公映日期，比荷里活可堪媲美的《女人風光》（美國，1939）早了整整7個月。<sup>10</sup>

### 1852至1930年：伍錦霞的前輩

無論伍錦霞之前可能會拍過甚麼業餘電影，舊金山的大舞臺戲院其實就是她的電影「學校」，當時她在那兒兼職，擔任劇院售票員。香港《星島日報》在1938年12月15日報導：「她曾任一間美國戲院的接待員，有機會看到很多電影。她的電影才華就是在那時候埋下種子。」

事實上，在這之前，她的成長還得力於美國華人戲院輝煌的歷史發展，而且，在1914年9月24日她出生的前前後後，已有很多人多方設法在美國本土建立一個華人的荷里活。

## 早期美國華裔戲劇及電影

### 舊金山

1852年中國舞台劇首次出現於舊金山。<sup>12</sup>

隨後在北美多地迅速茁壯，直到1882年美國聯邦頒佈《排華法案》（至1943年廢除），才導致美國華裔戲劇沒落，包括發展得最興旺的舊金山在內。然後，華裔戲劇連同其唐人街，在1906年舊金山大地震中，盡數毀於一旦。從1920年代起，才奇跡地復興。到了1936年，伍錦霞將要踏足電影之

際，正如最近重新發行的《華人劇院在美國》<sup>13</sup> 三大卷的作者所言：「華裔戲劇在這國家得以復興，已有人提出說，很可能直接歸因於女性開始踏上華人的戲劇舞台。」

1920年代舊金山的戲劇復興，始自兩間新建的中國影院長期激烈競爭：一家是在格蘭特街1021號的大舞臺戲院（1924年開業），另一家是在傑克遜街630號的大中華戲院（1925年開業）。與此同時，美國華人數次想在美國內陸建立一個商業的「華人荷里活」。

#### 1914-1917年：Lin Neong

據《奧克蘭論壇報》1914年6月16日報導，Lin Neong小姐是「第一個當上美國電影明星的純種中國女孩」，與她合作的是「美國國內第一間全由華人組成的電影公司。」文中提到的電影是《幫會大戰》，明顯是在1914年拍成，但正式上映日期卻是1917年2月7日，評論褒貶不一。《電影周刊》（美國，1917年2月17日）形容其電影劇本「是中國人寫的，在舊金山製作，演員全是華人，從『中國皇家演員』招募而來。」

同時代有份刊物，一位讀者來信，讚賞該片化妝出神入化，令演員真的「很像」中國人，接着有人回應：他們真的是中國人！



1916/1917—Marion Wong，世上第一個華裔女導演！

1916年中，舊金山出生、在加州奧克蘭市一帶演出的著名藝人歌手Marion Wong（Wong Wan-nee, aka Wong Nui-hi），註冊了東方電影公司（Mandarin Film Company），以方便編導演及設計自己劇情片《關武帝》。這部全由華人演出的劇情長片，故事設在當時加州，同時反映了1916年中國的緊張局勢和衝突情況。<sup>14</sup>

影片預映之後，就等發行商關注。

一年後，紐約的《電影世界》於1917年6月9日（頁1630）提到《關武帝》片長七本。7月22日，《奧克蘭論壇報》（頁15）一篇以「華裔女孩主演自編自導的電影」為題的人物採訪上，稱讚Marion。她在文章中說，很快「太平洋沿岸戲院的華人觀眾，會要求觀賞華人演的戲，就像他們會要求喝中國茶和吃麵條一樣。」

不幸，這個集監製、編劇、業務經理、導演、明星和發行商於一身的奇人，她這部電影卻沒有走紅，從此也再沒人找她拍商業片。然而，她是後來伍錦霞一個不可思議的先例。<sup>15</sup>

還有其他先例，其中特別重要的是長城電影公司。它於美國開業，1920年代中期前，移師上海，這本身就是一個引人

入勝的長篇故事。

### 1933年：拍片生涯

跳到1933年年中，終於有人在舊金山嘗試成功，而且做得多麼精彩！大觀聲片有限公司是新成立的片廠，要在當地建立華人明星制度，為自己的影片及其他華人電影建立國際銷售網。後來公司把大部份電影業務運作轉移到香港。那時候，伍錦霞正在大舞臺戲院兼職。

大觀影片公司成立，直接原因是1933年初於上海，製片人關文清同意在全美國試行發行四部由上海聯華影業公司製作的影片，<sup>16</sup> 包括長篇紀錄片《十九路軍抗日血戰史》（1932）、故事片《故都春夢》（1930）和《三個摩登女性》（1932），後兩部都由女星阮玲玉主演。關文清把影片拿到舊金山、洛杉磯、聖地牙哥、弗雷斯諾、新奧爾良、波特蘭、薩克拉門托、奧克蘭、芝加哥、克利夫蘭、匹茲堡、華盛頓、波士頓、紐約以及加拿大城市蒙特利爾、渥太華、多倫多、溫哥華、維多利亞等地的華人社區放映。<sup>17</sup>

他就這樣為香港粵語片建立起一個重要的美國發行網絡，也替伍錦霞後來的電影鋪平了道路。

到1933年6月初，伍錦霞的電影製作夢，看來可落實了。這一年，趙樹榮和關文清共同創辦大觀聲片有限公司，地址在

舊金山羅斯巷12號，董事局是一群美國華商。他們想利用跟舊金山戲院簽了契約的舞台紅星，開拍那些加插「歌唱片段」的當代故事片和喜劇。<sup>18</sup> 6月15日，格雷斯金斯利在《洛杉磯時報》的專欄上，以「華人籌設片廠」為題，宣佈大觀聲片有限公司經過「舊金山華埠要商」多月籌備，終於誕生。其製作的影片「針對華人市場，但首先會在美國主要的華人集散地放映。」舊金山已成了華人引頸期盼的美國華人荷里活，其國際市場跨越美國，遍及中國、東南亞及太平洋等地。

7月，該公司第一炮《歌侶情潮》（美國，1933）在舊金山上映，大受歡迎，是全世界第一部有聲粵語片。同年10月2日，澳門出生的嬌小女演員韋劍芳，到美國簽約加盟舊金山大舞臺戲院。她與戲院售票員伍錦霞成了好朋友，其後伍錦霞入行電影等事，已是後話了。<sup>19</sup>

### 1935年：《心恨》，又名《鐵血芳魂》

伍錦霞一家當時住在舊金山華盛頓街1010號，1933年該市的電話簿就是這樣記載的。

日期雖未能確定，但可能是接近1935年9月24日，即伍錦霞21歲生日那天，她說服父親伍于澤，連帶父親的生意夥伴，組成光藝聲片公司（其「美國化」名字則是Cathay Pictures Ltd.），資助她拍攝一部華語片，並透過關文清早已在北美各華埠開拓的市場（見上文）發行。為了讓西方人聽得舒服，

影片改了三個名字，一是粵語拼音的《心恨》（*Sum Hun*）；二是《心痛》（*Heartache/s*）；三是《鐵血芳魂》（*Iron Blood, Fragrant Soul*）。大概是這陣子，她的英文姓氏也由 Ng 改為更響亮、更像生意人的 Eng，同時也擔任影片的執行製片人。

《心恨》是「首部在荷里活拍攝的粵語歌唱有聲片」，這句宣傳及類似口號，於1936年在美國和香港深入民間。影片由韋劍芳和黃悲露擔任主角，演員唐棣忠和Henry Tung合撰劇本，<sup>20</sup> 唐棣忠親自執導。本片講述一位粵劇名旦（韋劍芳飾）和一名見習飛機師（黃悲露飾）之間的愛情悲劇。電影利用真正的飛機，並模擬空戰場面，以表現1932年的「淞滬之戰」。傳奇攝影師黃宗霽出任顧問，而出生於法國尼斯的保羅伊萬諾（Paul Ivano），是荷里活另一位攝影高手，負責掌鏡。所以本片是真正由中美演職員合作的成果。伊萬諾自己的「個人拍攝日程」上顯示，影片從1935年12月3日拍至14日，共拍了十日，126小時。<sup>21</sup>

### 1936年：錦霞粉墨欲登場

1936年1月29日，美國電影業界的《電影日報》，錯以為《心恨》是在美國拍攝的「第一部全由華人演出的有聲片」，還說其中一名主要配角叫Chow Souyu先生。

1935年底或1936年初（日期無法確實），據伍錦霞自己後來在香港所說，米高梅電影公司即將推出巨製《大地》（美

國，1937），她跑去試鏡，獲選後正式接受聘請，演出「蓮花」一角。該片改編自賽珍珠於1932年在美國出版、廣受好評的同名小說。為了確保伍錦霞簽約事宜，特地送她原劇本的複製本，若跟影片拍攝沒有正式關係的人，是拿不到的。但由於拍攝延遲，伍錦霞急於陪伴韋劍芳去香港參加《心恨》首映禮，於是沒多久就辭演了。<sup>22</sup>

2月14日，舊金山的《中國文摘》<sup>23</sup> 宣布，國泰電影公司的「超級歌唱有聲片《心痛》，本週六和週日將於舊金山大舞臺戲院公映。該片由關以倫（音譯）出資，伍錦霞和Bruce Wong監製，並由美國著名女星歌利亞史允臣的最佳攝影師保羅伊萬諾掌鏡。」<sup>24</sup>

4月13日，據《電影日報》報導，「中國廣州的Chow Souyu與《心恨》的製片人談過後，已來了西雅圖。這是荷里活拍攝的第一部全由華人演出的有聲片。」他有打算帶回廣州放映嗎？會不會在廣州也保存了一份拷貝？而三天前，這位早於1935年6月29日抵達舊金山的周先生<sup>25</sup>，在《奧格登標準評論報》（美國，1936年4月10日，頁26）<sup>26</sup> 上被稱為「廣東編輯聯會的常務理事」。美國其他報章都爭相報導他對時事的見解。

6月4日，伍錦霞和韋劍芳帶着珍貴的《心恨》拷貝（在港



放映時名為《鐵血芳魂》），乘坐胡佛總統號到達香港碼頭。

6月8日，香港華文報紙《中國日報》透露大家熱切期待兩人到來，而標題為「華南影壇熱烈歡迎韋劍芳」的文章說：「韋劍芳認為我們的電影應更着重文化推廣，伍錦霞則講述了拍攝《鐵血芳魂》的目的。」<sup>27</sup>

香港的電影工作者分明對美國加州的電影發展一直關注，所以對本地紅星韋劍芳和荷里活一位華裔年輕人合作拍片，深感興奮。但伍錦霞究竟是誰？！

6月30日，華南的舞台紅星韋劍芳，蒞臨香港中環皇后戲院，為《鐵血芳魂》放映禮剪綵，影片會在當天及翌日放映幾場。另一間專門放映歐洲電影的大華戲院，則宣傳《鐵血芳魂》為「第一部在荷里活拍攝的粵語片」，映期兩天，從1936年8月2日至3日。

七個月剛過，伍錦霞自己執導的處女作《民族女英雄》也上映了，更為她此行錦上添花。

## 錦霞之作！（1937-1939年）

1. 《民族女英雄》（1937年3月13日香港公映）

### 導演伍錦霞、編劇余寄萍

注：本片及以下四部電影的故事梗概，乃根據香港電影資料館的《香港影片大全》卷一，1913-1941<sup>28</sup> 稍加濃縮或重新安排，並採納了張建德英文版本的內容。

1937年3月13日：今天，伍錦霞的導演處女作《民族女英雄》，在港島的中央戲院首映。主角是韋劍芳，影片號稱「國防電影」，粵語對白，加入了歌舞和喜劇元素。這是1937年7月7日盧溝橋事變發生前不到四個月，事件促使了中國對日宣戰，全民開始了八年抗戰的日子。

與此同時，《民族女英雄》被公認為「救國運動的前奏」，也是一部頌揚中國女性的影片，獲得廣東女權協進聯會嘉許獎狀，不只表揚主演的演員，更特別表揚伍錦霞的卓越成就。<sup>29</sup>

其實那時候「國防」已經成了許多文學和戲劇工作者的神聖使命，尤其是香港電影，因為香港當時轉眼已變成了大陸藝術家逃離戰亂的避風港。《民族女英雄》的情節講述中國一位女青年志願從軍，證明要保衛祖國，婦女和男人一樣重要。若把《鐵血芳魂》也視為「國防電影」，則伍錦霞先後擔任製片及親自導演，在這類型已有兩部作品面世。

但她對這新掌握的電影媒界，還想探索其他方面。儘管本地評論對她的處女作反應頗佳，她對自己在香港的未來顯然不無憂慮。香港半月刊電影雜誌《藝林》（1937年第11期）有篇文章《中國首位女導演》，這樣評論她：

「寰球第一個中國女導演人伍錦霞小姐，向居於美洲之黃金國，年前以導演韋劍芳主演之《鐵血芳魂》一片，嶄然露頭角於中美兩國影壇，遂被推譽於一時，後女士抱一腔熱血挾同韋小姐邁返祖國，滿擬發展電影事業於南國影壇，續拍《民族女英雄》一片，不料女士因一向長居美州，其觀感，思想等俱以人地各殊而互異，故其作品有如陽春白雪忽成絕響（響）於一時，故女士以此形禁勢格，卒未可大展厥抱而於惓惓不得志之餘，遂動歸思矣，聞女士將於下月中旬即買舟返美，將來抵美後擬盡將所學在海外重張旗鼓再圖奮鬥。女士固時下多才多藝人，吾人知其不得志於此將可得志於彼，霞錦燦爛之前途尚未可限量也，天上無難事，人心自不堅，有志者事竟成，願女士深勉之也……」<sup>30</sup>

2. 《十萬情人》（1938年3月8日），  
導演伍錦霞、編劇余寄萍

大觀聲片有限公司的趙樹榮先生，顯然甚為欣賞《民族女英雄》，因為他接着監製了伍錦霞第二部長片《十萬情人》。

本片再次由伍錦霞「迷戀」的女主角韋劍芳擔綱，前作的許多配角也在本片出現，包括經常扮演「壞蛋」的周志誠、喜劇演員伊秋水及楊君俠，這一安排不失為票房保證。伊秋水以扮演差利卓別靈而深受歡迎，他在本片飾演的角色就叫卓勃靈。他也在伍錦霞下一部電影《妒花風雨》（見下文）中演出。《十萬情人》於1938年3月8日在香港上映。<sup>31</sup>

影片情節頗怪誕，使人想起美國「黑色」作家康乃爾伍立奇（Cornell Woolrich）經常被拍成電影的小說和短篇故事。香港電影資料館的影片大綱如下：

「鄉村職員陳志剛（吳楚帆飾），嚮往城市生活，毅然離妻別母到城裏去。他先後結識了舞女張美美，交際花何瑪莉及董事長之女李韻清（林妹妹飾）。周旋於三人間，志剛仍不滿足，於是召妻王淑卿（韋劍芳飾）到城裏去。韻清以經理一職作條件迫志剛跟她結婚，志剛答應韻清的婚事，並遣妻回鄉。淑卿傷心離去，但卻幸運地錯過了遇事之輪船。淑卿乘機佯裝遇難，以歌女「冷月」的身份留於城中。此時，美美因誤會殺死瑪莉，被警方捉拿。志剛與韻清成婚之日，剛母發現二人乃親生兄妹。最後，淑卿表明自己的身份，與志剛言歸於好，一起回鄉興辦教育事業。」

據《藝林》（第25期，1938年3月1日）報導，伍錦霞這第二部港產片，「是大觀影業最近出品中最輕鬆的一部，也是女導演伍錦霞加入大觀的第一部新作，導演手法相當細膩…」<sup>32</sup>



圖三 《妒風花雨》（1938）

Fig 3 *Tragic Love* (1938)

儘管片名頗有滑稽意味，片中還有差利式人物，但《香港影片大全》卷一卻將本片歸類為「時裝／社教片」。

3. 《妒風花雨》，又名《偷龍轉鳳》（1938年11月15日），導演伍錦霞、編劇余寄萍

《香港影片大全》卷一對這部（被視為「散佚」的）電影概述如下：

「一雙青年愛侶不理家庭反對，偷偷結婚，而女的更因此懷了身孕。然而，二人最終仍不敵家人的拆散。最後，男的移情別戀，而女的則服毒自殺身亡。」主演者有梁雪霏、盧敦等，盧敦本身也是電影導演。





圖四 1938年，伍錦霞（右）  
與胡鵬（左）攝於南洋片場。

Fig 4 Esther Ng (right) and Wu  
Pang (left) in Nanyang Film  
Studio, 1938.

羅卡接受《金門銀光夢》（香港，2013）的導演魏時煜訪問時，說《妒風花雨》是關於兩女一男的三角關係，也是社會諷刺劇，由著名編劇余寄萍執筆，於邵氏南洋片場拍攝。「到了中間，她就開始生病，染上了瘧疾，所謂『發冷』。但是她堅持仍然要去片場拍片，直至她真的支持不住了，然後才回家休養。」

4. 《一夜夫妻》（1938年11月20日），

伍錦霞與梁偉民、胡鵬合導；編劇馮鳳譚

正如《香港影片大全》卷一說：「吳楚帆一夕風流後，白燕珠胎暗結，但吳楚帆卻薄倖無情，置白燕於不顧，弄得白燕淪落風塵，母子分離，待吳楚帆覺悟前非，而白燕母子亦終能重逢時，白燕卻已含恨而終。」

圖五 《女人世界》（1939）  
Fig 5 *It's a Women's World* (1939)



魏時煜導演的《金門銀光夢》（香港，2013）劇本初稿上寫道：「於是女主角開始備受歧視，生活從此陷入困頓，這悲劇深深打動了當時的觀眾。」

5. 《女人世界》，原名《三十六女天罡》  
（1939年2月1日），與魯司聯合導演／編劇

本片必是她電影中最抱負不凡之作，因為在《藝林》上的預告至少有8個半月之久，即從1938年5月15日那期，直至1939年2月1日的香港首映。《女人世界》擁有36位女明星的陣容，創意凌厲，非她其他作品可比，為此發掘本片顯然成了當務之急。幸好，紐約州資料館找到一部題為《女人世界》的劇本，可能正是本片。

《香港影片大全》卷一說：「《女人世界》由36位女明星合力演出各式各樣的女性形象：有古板的教師、花枝招展的科員、精明能幹的新聞記者、言行嚴正的律師、提倡健美的醫生、醉生夢死的舞女、燈紅酒綠的交際花和淒涼無倚的棄婦等等。這些女性不同的際遇與身世，揭露了婦女在社會上所面對的種種問題與困境。本片是香港第一部全由女演員擔綱演出的電影。」

本片確實晚於同類電影的「第一部」，即荷里活的《娘子軍》（美國，1931）。當時的《綜藝》雜誌（1931年9月22日）批評該片「故事單薄，對話粗糙。」影片由威廉博丁（William Beaudine）執導，講述美國參加第一次世界大戰後，九名美國婦女進駐法國盟軍前線的故事。<sup>33</sup>

自從伍錦霞於1936年6月4日抵港後，香港的華文報紙對她又敬又畏，既詳盡報導她身為電影藝術家的事業浮沉，也提及她留港期間與兩位女演員的「親密」關係，但行文毫無敵意，從來不會用諸如「女同志」或「同性戀」等字眼，而且據我看來，毫無「緋聞」味道。有關她的事蹟，不管是為公的業務或為私的感情，都是她整個人的一部份：她要其他人，包括她的至交，稱呼她「霞哥」。她連走路姿態、所穿衣服、情緒表達，都帶有「男性」特質。霞哥是荷里活來的。霞哥是好榜

樣！

### 戰時：香港電影跑到舊金山

1933年至1939年間，大觀聲片有限公司把主要創作活動，從舊金山移到香港。那時候，據羅卡說：「大觀從1939至1945年，即使因太平洋戰爭期間失去了其他觀眾（包括香港市場），卻特別針對美國華裔的需求，拍了近三十部美國劇情片（根據韓燕麗近期研究）。有些是16毫米彩色，有些是35毫米黑白，全都配上粵語聲軌。這是首次由華人導演拍攝了大量電影，忠實反映美國華人的生活。【…】沒有一部是幻想作品或歷史題材，全都是寫實手法，描繪華人的生活起居。」

Marion Wong 只能有羨慕的份兒。

### 美國尾聲

以上對這位出類拔萃的女電影人如何走上電影之路，不過是管窺蠡測。篇幅有限，只能簡單列出她從1941年至1961年拍的其餘作品。至於更詳細的資料，她在1939年後的書信，她保存的眾多照片，以及全面總結她的劇本如何拍成電影，這些都只好留待日後再續了。單是她收藏的照片，就可以讓我們更能領悟她的電影內涵：從她六十年代晚年與家人、朋友、拍片員工的照片，回溯到她娃娃臉的少女時代，她與

年輕女性朋友彼此互贈、充滿深情的照片兼心意卡。後者包括她十七歲時在一張圖片卡寫的悲傷語句：「懷念亡友Frances Lee——終於1932年2月29日」，還附上（很可能是）她自己畫的插圖，黑底白字，也許是仿照古畫——小湖輕舟，青山綠樹，令她為亡友挑選的唐詩，更有意境：

唐代詩人王維的《山居秋暝》：

空山新雨後，天氣晚來秋。

明月松間照，清泉石上流。

竹喧歸浣女，蓮動下漁舟。

隨意春芳歇，王孫自可留。<sup>34</sup>

## 離別香江之作

6. 《金門女》（美國，舊金山首映：1941年5月15日，大觀劇院，傑克遜街756號）

影評喜歡這部電影（《綜藝》雜誌，1941年5月28日）：「故事淺白易懂，大量出現舊金山一帶的慣見景色，尤其是唐人街、碼頭、金門公園等【…】還有其他可借題發揮的角度，如導演是中國唯一的女導演……」。然而，本片身兼編劇、剪接及演員的關文清，卻聲稱導演是他一個人。這問題仍未有定論。





圖六 1947年，伍錦霞（中）攝於大觀公司。  
Fig 6 Esther Ng (middle) in Grandview Film Company, 1947.



圖七 《虛度春宵》（1948）  
Fig 7 *Back Street* (1948)

## 7. 《藍湖碧玉》（1947）（1949年3月6日香港上映）

由小非非（即李非非）及其長期拍檔廖其偉主演，廖其偉是美國被譽為特藝彩色片皇牌小生的華裔演員，伍錦霞下兩部電影也是他主演。

## 8. 《虛度春宵》（1948）

1948年2月，片名《遲來春已晚》改為《虛度春宵》，以向荷里活改編美國小說家芬妮赫斯特1931年小說《後街》的電影版本（1932年和1942年）致敬。

據《電影圈》雜誌（馬來亞唯一一份中國電影月刊）第147期（1949年7月15日）記載：「《虛度春宵》，為伍錦霞



圖八 《紐約碎屍案》  
(1961)

Fig 8 *Murder in New York  
Chinatown* (1961)

導演的第二部翡翠七彩瑰麗鉅片，仍由小非非廖奇偉主演。內容寫一銀行家在三藩市與一賣花女郎相戀，金屋藏嬌之後，幾度離合，藕斷絲連，生死纏綿，極盡哀怨之至【…】從本片之劇情，色彩，佈景，聲光與攝影技術觀之，均足與好萊塢之七彩片媲美。」<sup>35</sup>

#### 9. 《荒島情焰》（美國，1949），導演

一部不可不尋回，不可不觀看的作品，1948年拍的彩色電影，全在夏威夷取景，1949至1950年僅作有限的國際公映。新加坡華文報紙《南洋商報》廣告說該片只映三天（1950年10月24-26日）。

10. 《紐約碎屍案》，又名《紐約唐人街碎屍案》、《唐人街碎屍案》、《美國紐約唐人街命案》（美國，1961），導演：胡鵬，聯合導演／外景導演：伍錦霞

這次伍錦霞「東山復出」，背景耐人尋味，其中細節在《金門銀光夢》（魏時煜執導，香港，2013年）一片頗有交代。至於誰是主要導演——是在紐約拍外景的她，還是在香港拍攝的胡鵬——這問題仍有待查證。

## 錦霞淡出…

我們沒有沃爾特溫切爾那種快人快語，但我們可借用電影怪傑約瑟夫·馮·史登堡一段軼事，道出伍錦霞開創華語電影最不尋常的生涯時（即使這生涯未能發揚光大），那種「敢作敢為」的態度：

約瑟夫·馮·史登堡在1966年接受訪問，談到「教導」電影專業的學生如何擁有導演的洞察力時，向英國歷史學家凱文布朗洛說：「我可提議一些當導演要具備而絕對嚇死人的資格【…】，他必須精通電影語言，必須懂得自古以來的戲劇史，必須是心理分析專家，受過少許精神病學的訓練。他必須對每一種情緒瞭如指掌。」

「他們問我：『那你有這資格嗎？』我說。『沒有，可我從未問過人怎樣當導演。』」<sup>36</sup>（翻譯：徐昌明）

法蘭賓，澳洲籍演員、編劇及監製，1990年開始從事香港電影歷史研究，與羅卡合著《香港電影跨文化觀》（2004），亦花了多年時間研究伍錦霞及尹海靈的生平與電影事業。有關伍錦霞的研究，見〈尋找伍錦霞——被遺忘的先驅〉（《電影藝術》總第309期，北京，電影藝術雜誌社，2006年）等文章。

## 參考資料

### 互聯網

有關中國電影歷史的互動網站（圖文並茂、精心研究而且饒有趣味）：

Marion: Don Marion's [www.chinesemirror.com](http://www.chinesemirror.com)

Wells: David Wells' [www.softfilm.blogspot.com](http://www.softfilm.blogspot.com)

Yang: 子宇的 [www.hsiamoon.blog.163.com](http://www.hsiamoon.blog.163.com) 及 [www.chinesecinemasgoldenage.blogspot.com/](http://www.chinesecinemasgoldenage.blogspot.com/)

### 影片

《金門銀光夢》（香港，2013）：有關伍錦霞的紀錄長片，魏時煜編導，羅卡及魏時煜監製，香港藝術發展局、藍后文化傳播有限公司聯合出品

《荷里活華人》（美國，2007），曾奕田編導，Deep Focus Productions Inc.出品，有關（北美）荷里活電影及電影工作者（包括演員、編劇及導演）如何認知美籍華人及中國人的重要概述。參看 [www.hollywoodchinese.com](http://www.hollywoodchinese.com)

謹此鳴謝以下關鍵人士及機構的協助：傅慧儀、羅卡、Ian Ward、魏時煜、Alex Zhang Boyuan（協助翻譯中文原文）、曾奕田、Don Marion、David Wells、Wong Han-min、Yeung Bick-har // AFI Research Collection（皇家墨爾本理工大學）、East Asian Collection（墨爾本大學圖書館）、香港大學圖書館特藏及文獻組、香港電影資料館、香港中央圖書館、維多利亞州立圖書館（不只感謝他們於2004年製作了ancestry.com；其他鳴謝見附註）。

### 後記：安妮·克蘭

若沒有安妮·克蘭的協助，本文根本寫不成。她身兼作者、編輯和歷史學家，是我的朋友。她是國家科學研究中心的研究員，目前在現代歷史研究所專研中國歷史和中國電影史。她正在撰寫一本書，講述二十世紀二十及三十年代活躍於上海（及香港）的聯華影業公司。

她身為獨立編輯，委託本人及其他作者就中國電影史撰寫文章，鼓勵我們研究。文章結集後將會翻譯成法文，在某法國期刊的「中國電影」特輯內發表，可惜她的編輯原則跟期刊的原則出現了深刻分歧，因此計劃告吹。但她這本「中國電影」特輯來日必會刊行，只是日期未定。我對她表示衷心感謝。法蘭賓

## 註釋

1. 本文所用圖片，除特別註明外，屬「伍錦霞相片集」及其最大持有人黃文約與香港電影資料館所有。魏時煜、羅卡及法蘭賓之個別項目獲以上最大持有人特別許可，可使用此相片集之圖片，其他人或機構未經許可，不得擅自採用。
2. 另一位為尹海靈，見《通訊》第65期，2013年8月，頁10-15，香港電影資料館出版，可到香港電影資料館網站閱覽。
3. 根據Richard Andress（紐約州資料館前資料管理員）文章〈Film Censorship in New York State〉，可於網上找到。
4. 香港電影第一個「黃金時代」可說是1936-1941年。
5. Walter Winchell：〈Broadway and Elsewhere〉，《Pharos-Tribune》（Logansport, Indiana, US），1959年9月14日，頁4（通過newspaperarchive.com取得）。
6. 魏時煜容許我閱讀其影片《金門銀光夢》（香港，2013）的早期劇本，當中提出了黃宗霽與伍錦霞的交情及他的協助。
7. McLaughlin, Kathleen：《The New York Times》，1967年6月29日，頁67。
8. 「九一八事變」始末可見於網上及其他資料。
9. 見Lee, Clark：《They Call it the Pacific》，The Viking Press，紐約，1943，頁45，第2段。
10. 根據現在IMDB網站的條目，《女人風光》美國首映日期為1939年9月1日。
11. 《San Francisco Chronicle》，1930年12月5日，頁4。鳴謝David Wells協助確認細節。而奇怪的是，照片顯示的手寫日期誤為1931年2月5日。
12. Soulé, Frank：《Annals of San Francisco》，包括加州首次被發現、移民、發展及現況的歷史概要，以及此城市所有事件的完整歷史，並加入一些著名市民的生平回憶錄，由John H. Gihon及James Nisbet捐出，D.Appleton（紐約）出版，1855。出處：State Library of Victoria [SLV] 索取號 MC 979.4 S08。
13. Peter Chu, Lois M.Foster, Nadia Lavrova, Steven C.Moy：《Chinese Theatres in America》（三冊），Cyrilla P.Lindner監督及計劃：1936年美國Federal Theatre的Bureau of Research出版之Federal Theatre Project。此三冊藏於美國加州三藩市公共圖書館。索書號：792.079F317c (vols 1,2&3)



- 14 亦可參看 <http://persephonemagazine.com/2011/06/badass-ladies-of-history-marion-wong/>.
- 15 2004年，曾奕田在籌拍其長片《荷里活華人》（美國，2007）時取得《關武帝》（美國，1916/17）35毫米及16毫米的僅存片段，當中已可看到許多原來的特色。
- 16 關文清：《中國銀壇外史》，香港：廣角鏡出版社，1976，頁72-76。
- 17 同上，頁143。
- 18 鳴謝羅卡。建基於羅卡和我及何思穎早前的有關研究，詳見《Hong Kong Cinema: a Cross Cultural View》（Scarecrow Press，美國，2004）。
- 19 韋劍芳，被確認為「女演員」，十九歲，澳門出生，1933年9月7日從香港登上SS Empress of Canada（又名：瑪嘉烈公主號）。她受雇於舊金山大舞臺戲院，於1933年9月30日抵達華盛頓州西雅圖，10月2日獲准進入美國，及後才到舊金山。資料來源：西雅圖1903-1944年存於國家資料庫的船期及中國旅客網上資料。
- 20 他們的劇本以中英文版本向紐約州審查局提交，現存於紐約州立資料館。就是閱讀劇本，《心恨》已相當催人淚下！
- 21 存於加州比華利山AMPAS' Margaret Herrick Library中的保羅伊萬諾私人文件。鳴謝 Elaine Mae Woo寄來副本。
- 22 伍錦霞於《藝林》第55期（1939年6月1日）確認此事。此事證明：（1）她曾讓《藝林》記者看她的《大地》（美國，1937）複製劇本，而此劇本只有獲米高梅電影公司聘用的演出才會擁有；（2）她對於錯失在《大地》演出一事感遺憾。
- 23 《中國文摘》當時為英文周刊，由Chinese Cultural Society of America出版。
- 24 難怪Betty Cornelius在十年後將帶點誇張地表示：「伍錦霞當時仍然年少，並非出身於這種冒險事業，卻跑到荷里活去，在日落大道租了工作室，拍了她第一部針對當地及中國華人市場的電影」，Betty Cornelius，《西雅圖時報》，1946年6月9日。
- 25 出處：Ancestry.com 1882-1957年加州的船客及船務員網上資料，原物料為國家資料庫移民局1910-1941年的微縮膠片M1388，4卷；華盛頓國家資料庫的1893-1953年船期資料，微縮膠片M1410，429卷。
- 26 通過 Newspaperarchive.com 取得。
- 27 Alex Zhang Bouyuan 翻譯。

- 28 《香港影片大全》卷一，1913-1941，黃淑嫻編，香港電影資料館，香港，1997。
- 29 以上資料由羅卡提供，特此鳴謝。
- 30 《藝林》第11期，香港，香港大同貿易公司，1937年7月11日，Alex Zhang Bouyuan翻譯。
- 31 參看1938年3月9日《香港工商日報》娛樂版上《十萬情人》之廣告。有關差利的部份，鳴謝羅卡。
- 32 Alex Zhang Bouyuan 翻譯。
- 33 《The American Film Institute Catalog – Feature Films 1931-1940》，加州大學出版社編（Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford），1993，頁1274。
- 34 Ian Ward 翻譯。
- 35 Ian Ward 翻譯。
- 36 《FILM》，The Magazine of the Federation of Film Societies，第45號，1966春季，Woking, Surrey U.K.，頁10。

# Esther Eng — Electric Shadow

— Frank Bren<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Sino-American Esther Eng is one of the two most imposing woman filmmakers of early Chinese cinema.<sup>2</sup>

She was born, like her parents, in San Francisco though her ancestral roots lay in Taishan county in China's Guangdong province. Like many Chinese-Americans, those dual East-West roots were central to her story and, as a filmmaker, to her storytelling.

Recent research suggests that copy scripts for at least three of her Hong Kong films are held by New York State Archives (NYSA) in Albany, the capital city of NY State. Though a self-contained film censorship system began in NY in 1921, it collapsed in 1965 when the US Supreme Court intervened to reverse the state of Maryland's decision to ban a Danish film. The NY authorities quickly saw the writing on the wall and abandoned the state's own film examination system, closure effective from September 30 that year.<sup>3</sup>

Result? NYSA stores dialogue scripts for almost 55,000 US-produced movies plus similar “foreign” scripts (with certified English translations where applicable) for all domestic or “foreign” films seeking distribution in NY state until 1965. Surprisingly, of the foreign group, “Hong Kong” has easily the largest list with 2,454 titles, beyond Mexico’s 2,348, Great Britain’s 1,970, and so on. They were non-returnable scripts demanded by state censors as part of the inspection/approval process up until 1965. Thus, for historians, Albany is the font of rich author information even on “lost” films for which adequate prints no longer exist for screening.

Such is the case with the films of Esther Eng and those of her nearest rival as the earliest professional Chinese woman film director, Wan Hoi-ling (see essay on p.152-187).

This essay considers Esther's personal formation and, especially, her early years in Hong Kong where she cut her filmmaking teeth soon after arriving there on June 4, 1936. Just 21 at the time, she had recently co-produced, though not directed, a single feature in Hollywood (below) and that aura of "Hollywood producer" opened doors in Hong Kong, complementing her personal chutzpah and natural talent. She would remain in the territory before quitting, at parental insistence, on October 9, 1939, with the spectre of the nearby Sino-Japanese war, then into its third year, eventually to spill over into Hong Kong.

In between, Esther Eng, had successfully participated in Hong Kong cinema's first "golden age".<sup>4</sup>

Still only 25 when she left, and despite several weeks' illness from late 1938 to early 1939, her filmography looked healthy, comprising five HK features directed or co-directed by her plus *Sum Hun* (US, 1936), the Hollywood feature she had executive-produced during 1935/1936. At 25, she was already a "total" filmmaker as director, producer, writer and distributor, all in varying degrees, foreshadowing what should have become a successful career in the United States.

Yet barely a decade on she would abandon the cinema and, a

decade after that, have achieved another kind of stardom, being talked about in the same breath as actors Marlon Brando and Anna Magnani – but as Esther Eng, successful Manhattan restaurateur!

### Manhattan success

“New rendezvous for Tenn. Williams, Brando, Magnani and other celebs is Esther Eng’s chow-meinery at 58th and 2nd. Esther directed plays in China...”

– Walter Winchell, 14 September 1959<sup>5</sup>

Press agents and “other celebs” would fight for such recognition by Walter Winchell, the media gossip king.

However, in 1959, Jimmy Wong Howe, one of the greatest cinematographers in North American film history, could appreciate the plug even more than its target, his good friend Esther Eng. Perhaps he had arranged it, having so often commended her restaurants to his showbusiness friends whenever that chance arose.<sup>6</sup> In 1935, he had mentored Esther on film technique when she was just 21 and looking, some said, like a teenaged boy, a kid Hollywood producer planning to make Cantonese films for international Chinese markets and for mainstream American consumption.

She nearly did both.



But, throughout the 1950s, her film world dimmed while she gradually became one of Manhattan's more visible restaurateurs with even the *New York Times* later hailing her as that “five foot tall dynamo” who in 1950 swept into New York “from her native San Francisco to adopt Chinatown and its restaurants and be adopted by them, with benefit to all.” The same report said that “Miss Eng had one almost legendary career behind her as an international producer, director and distributor of Chinese-language films”.<sup>7</sup>

It is from that peak of success that this essay looks back to her abrupt early rise as a just-do-it! enfant terrible of motion pictures before that strange fog of incurious historiography forgot her for most of the rest of the 20th century.

## Forming Esther Eng

### Significance

Anticipating the outline of her early career below, we touch on her significance for world cinema, the business of this essay, despite the “loss” of almost all of her films beyond the recently-discovered scripts.

Her first feature, *Sum Hun* (US, 1936), as its executive producer, plus her directing debut, *National Heroine* (HK, 1937), were Cantonese examples of “national defence” cinema. This peculiarly

Chinese genre mixed story-telling, entertainment and consciousness-raising for all Chinese in or out of China in the face of persistent Japanese aggression towards their motherland, especially in the wake of two world-shaking events. These were the Japanese occupation of Manchuria following the “Mukden Incident” of September 18, 1931<sup>8</sup> soon followed by the Japanese military invasion of Shanghai on January 28, 1932. The horrendous aftermath of the latter comprised what we now call the “Shanghai War”, itself a plot point of *Sum Hun*. The earlier “Mukden Incident”, lest we forget, was the real starting point of World War II.<sup>9</sup>

Another kind of Esther Eng film, *It’s a Women’s World*, has grown in significance long after its HK premiere on February 1, 1939. She co-scripted and co-directed it with Lo Si and, by its plot description, the film was a densely constructed story of contemporary Hong Kong, astonishing many as an early all-woman film with 36 female stars! in a release predating Hollywood’s comparable *The Women* (US, 1939) by exactly seven months.<sup>10</sup>

#### 1852 – 1930: before Esther Eng.

Whatever amateur films Esther may have made early on, San Francisco’s Mandarin Theatre effectively became her “school” while she worked part-time as the theatre’s box office clerk. As Hong Kong’s *Sing Tao Daily* would note on December 15, 1938: “She used



Fig.1 “Esther Ng leading a group of clever drummer girls in the Pagoda Festival Parade through Chinatown last night, in which thousands of Chinese children took part in.” Esther is second from the right.<sup>11</sup>

to be a receptionist in a US theatre giving her the chance to see a lot of movies. The seed of her talent in movies was planted there and then.”

Indeed, but pre-dating that, she also owed something to the spectacular historical developments of US-Chinese theatre and the many attempts to create a Chinese Hollywood within the US itself, before, during and after her actual birth day of September 24, 1914.

## Early Sino-American theatre and cinema.

### San Francisco

Chinese stage drama first appeared in San Francisco in 1852.<sup>12</sup>

It quickly grew and developed in many areas of North America before the US federal “Chinese Exclusion Act” of 1882 (in force

until 1943) assisted its decline, including in San Francisco, the most spectacular US example. There, it vanished totally along with its famous Chinatown in that city's infamous earthquake of 1906 before a miraculous theatrical boom would flower there from the 1920s on. By 1936, close to the beginning of Esther's film career, authors of the newly issued three-volume book, *Chinese Theatres in America*<sup>13</sup> could reflect: "It is possible, and has been postulated, that the renaissance of the Chinese drama in this country is directly attributable to the admission of women to the Chinese stage."

The 1920s theatrical boom arose from an intense, long-running competition in San Francisco between its two newly-built Chinese theatres: the Mandarin at 1021 Grant Street (opened in 1924) and the Great China at 630 Jackson Street (1925). Echoing that were several attempts by Chinese-Americans to launch a commercial, internal US "Chinese Hollywood".

### 1914-1917: Lin Neong

According to the *Oakland Tribune* of June 16, 1914: "Miss Lin Neong [is] the first full blooded Chinese girl" to be a US film star, while working with "the first complete Chinese company ever associated in this country with the moving picture business." The film concerned was *The War of the Tongs*, apparently completed in 1914 though its formal theatrical opening was on 7 February 1917 gathering mixed reviews. *Moving Picture Weekly* (US, 17 Feb. 1917)

described it as a photoplay “written by a Chinaman, and produced in San Francisco [with] an all-Chinese cast, recruited from the Imperial Chinese Players.”

A reader’s letter in one contemporary publication praised the film’s high standard for make-up because the actors looked really Chinese - a follow-up letter advising: they are Chinese!

1916/1917 – Marion Wong,  
world’s first-known Chinese woman filmmaker!

In mid 1916, San Francisco-born Marion E. Wong (Wong Wannee, aka Wong Nui Hi), a noted singer-entertainer in and around Oakland, California, registered the Mandarin Film Company to facilitate her writing, directing, designing and acting in her own feature movie, *The Curse of Quon Gwon*. For its story settings, this all-Chinese feature length used local contemporary California and 1916’s tensions and conflicts within contemporary China.<sup>14</sup>

Following a preview screening, it awaited the attention of distributors.

A year on, page 1630 of New York’s trade weekly, *Moving Picture World* of June 9, 1917, described *Quon Gwon* as a seven-reeler. On July 22, the *Oakland Tribune* (page 15), under the headline, “Chinese Girl Is Film Star In Own Dramas”, praised

Marion in a revealing interview-based portrait. She declared that, soon “Chinese patronage in Pacific Coast theaters will demand Chinese dramas [like] they demand their tea and noodles.”

Unfortunately, for this wondrous producer, scenarist, business manager, director, star and distributor, the film failed to take off and she never essayed another commercial picture. However, she was an uncanny prototype for the later Esther Eng.<sup>15</sup>

There are other examples, notably the important Great Wall film company that emigrated from the US (where formed) to Shanghai in the early-mid 1920s, a long, enthralling story in itself.

### 1933: Reel Life

Jumping ahead to mid 1933, one such attempt did finally succeed in San Francisco, and how brilliantly! “Grandview” was its name, a newly formed production house that would establish a local Chinese star system and a chain of international outlets for its own and others’ Chinese films before soon moving most of its film operations to Hong Kong. At the time, Esther Eng was working part-time at the Mandarin Theater.

The direct cause of Grandview’s formation lay in early 1933 Shanghai, where the filmmaker-producer, Kwan Man-ching (aka Moon Kwan) agreed to test-distribute four films produced by



Shanghai's "Lianhua" (or "United China") film company throughout the United States.<sup>16</sup> They included the feature documentary, *Army Route 19—Fighting the Japanese Enemy* (1932), and the dramas, *Spring Dream in the Old Capital* (1930) and *Three Modern Girls* (1932), both starring actress Ruan Lingyu. Kwan exhibited the films to Chinese communities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Fresno, New Orleans, Portland, Sacramento, Oakland, Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Washington, Boston, and New York as well as in Canadian cities Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, and Victoria.<sup>17</sup>

He thus built an important US distribution network for Hong Kong's Cantonese films, paving the way too for Esther's later films.

By early June 1933, Esther's movie-making dreams looked practical. That year, Joseph Sunn Jue (aka Chiu Shu-sun) and Kwan Man-ching co-founded Grandview Film Company Limited at 12 Ross Alley, San Francisco, under a board of Chinese-American businessmen. They aimed to make contemporary film dramas and comedies with "singing inserts" exploiting popular theatrical stars then under contract to Chinese theatres in San Francisco.<sup>18</sup> On June 15, Grace Kingsley's column in the *Los Angeles Times*, headed "Chinese Company Organised", announced the birth of "Grandview Film Company" after many months' organization by "leading

merchants of San Francisco Chinatown”. Its films were intended “for the Chinese market but will be shown at the leading centers of Chinese population in the United States first.” San Francisco had become that long anticipated Chinese-American Hollywood with international markets beyond America including China, South East Asia and pockets of the Pacific.

In July, the company’s first feature, *Blossom Time* aka *Romance of the Songsters* (US, 1933) opened in San Francisco, enjoying great success as one of the world’s first Cantonese talkies. The same year on October 2, petite Macau-born actress Wai Kim-fong, entered the United States to join San Francisco’s Mandarin Theater under contract. She would befriend that theatre’s box office clerk, Esther Eng, and the rest (Esther as filmmaker) would be history.<sup>19</sup>

### 1935: *Sum Hun* aka *Heartache/s*

The Ng family were then living at San Francisco’s 1010 Washington Street, so recorded in the city’s directories as early as 1933.

The dates are unclear, but possibly close to Esther’s 21st birthday on September 24, 1935, she persuaded her father, Ng Yu-jat (Ng Yee Jack), and, by extension, his business associates, to form Kwong Ngai [Bright Art] Talking Pictures Company whose “Americanised”

name, Cathay Pictures Ltd., would follow. The object was to finance a Chinese-language feature for distribution throughout the North American Chinatowns already developed as a market (above) by Kwan Man-ching. For Western ears, the proposed film adopted three names: the better-known *Sum Hun*, romanised Cantonese for 心恨 (literally, “Heart Hate”) then *Heartache/s* then *Iron Blood, Fragrant Soul*. Around this time, she replaced her surname “Ng” with the more business-like and pronouncable “Eng”, also becoming the project’s executive producer.

*Sum Hun* was the “First Cantonese Singing-Talking Picture made in Hollywood”, that phrase and variations of it being widely promoted in the US and Hong Kong during 1936. It starred Wai Kim-fong and Beal Wong in the leading roles, actor Frank Tang and Henry Tung co-wrote the script,<sup>20</sup> with Tang himself directing this drama of a tragic affair between a successful stage artiste (Wai) and her great love for a trainee air pilot (Wong). The film co-opted real aircraft and simulated air battles to represent the “Shanghai War” of 1932. Legendary cinematographer James Wong Howe was there as a consultant while Nice-born Frenchman, Paul Ivano, another Hollywood “heavy”, shot the picture – in all, a real Sino-American crew co-operation. Ivano’s “personal camera work time journal” shows that he shot the film within 10 days/126 hours during December 3-14, 1935.<sup>21</sup>

### 1936: Esther Eng, actress?

On January 29, 1936, US trade newspaper *Film Daily* claimed (erroneously) that *Heartaches* was “the first all-Chinese sound motion picture” ever filmed in the United States. A Mr. Chow Souyu was listed among the film’s principal supporting actors.

In late 1935 or early 1936 (the time cannot be confirmed) and according to later testimony by Esther herself in Hong Kong, she auditioned for, won, and formally accepted the role of "Lotus" in MGM’s forthcoming super production, *The Good Earth* (US, 1937), adapted from Pearl Buck’s acclaimed novel of that name as originally published in the US in 1932. To seal this, she received a precious copy of the script, otherwise unavailable to those not officially connected to the production. But the shooting was delayed and, anxious to accompany Wai Kim-fong to a Hong Kong premiere of *Sum Hun*, she soon quit *The Good Earth*.<sup>22</sup>

On February 14, San Francisco’s *Chinese Digest*<sup>23</sup> announced that Cathay Pictures’ “super singing and talking picture, ‘*Heartaches*’, will be shown at San Francisco’s Mandarin Theater this Saturday and Sunday. ‘*Heartaches*’ is financed by Quon Yim Lum and produced by Esther Eng and Bruce Wong, with Paul Ivano, formerly Gloria Swanson’s best cameraman, doing the camera work.”<sup>24</sup>

On April 13, according to *Film Daily*, “Chow Souyu, of Canton, China, has been in Seattle, after conferring with producers of *Sum Hun*, first all-Chinese talkie to be made in Hollywood.” Did he intend to screen the film back in Canton? Could such a print have survived there? Three days earlier, Mr. Chow who had arrived in San Francisco on 29 June, 1935,<sup>25</sup> was described by *The Ogden Standard Examiner* (US, April 10, 1936, page 26)<sup>26</sup> as an “executive director of the Union of Editors, Kwang-tong”. His views on current affairs were sought for publication in other US newspapers.

On June 4, Esther and Wai Kim-fong, with their precious print of *Heartache/Sum Hun*, arrived in Hong Kong aboard the ship, President Hoover.

On June 8, HK’s *Chinese Daily* (in Chinese) revealed that the pair were eagerly anticipated and, under the headline, “Warm welcome to Wai Kim-fong by South China’s film industry” said “Wai argues that our movies should focus on heavier cultural promotion. Esther Eng reveals the purpose of making *Sum Hun*.”<sup>27</sup>

Hong Kong’s film workers had evidently followed filmmaking developments in California and were excited by this partnership of local favourite Wai Kim-fong with a Hollywood Chinese-American youngster. But who exactly was Esther Eng??!

On June 30, Wai, the popular stage star of Southern China, appeared onstage at the Queen's Theatre in Central, Hong Kong Island, to launch *Heartache*, then running at the Queen's for several sessions on June 30 and July 1. Another European-patronized venue, Majestic Theatre, advertised *Heartache* as "The First Cantonese Picture Made in Hollywood" for the film's two-day season there on August 2 and 3, 1936.

It would be just over 7 months before Esther could crown this trip with the release of her own directorial debut, *National Heroine*.

### Esther Eng Films! (1937-1939)

1. *National Heroine*, (HK released on 13 March 1937), as solo director, written by Yu Kei-ping

NB: the plot summaries of this and of the four following films come direct, slightly shortened or rearranged, from the Hong Kong Film Archive's (HKFA's) *Hong Kong Filmography, Vol. I, 1913-1941*<sup>28</sup> co-opting the English versions therein by Stephen Teo.

March 13, 1937: Today, Esther's debut film as director, *National Heroine*, opened in Hong Kong Island's Central Theatre. The title role was Wai Kim-fong's in a film billed as a "National Defence"



spectacle, in Cantonese, with songs and comedy. This was less than four months before the “Marco Polo Bridge Incident” of July 7, 1937, which precipitated China’s declaration of war against Japan and eight years of further military conflict on a grand scale.

Meanwhile, *National Heroine* was generally recognized as a “prelude to the Saving the Country Movement”, a film that honoured “Chinese Womanhood”. The Kwangtung Federation of Women’s Rights issued a Certificate of Merit, recognising the leading players and, specifically, the remarkable achievement of Esther Ng.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, “National Defence” was by now a sacred duty for many working in literature and drama, especially cinema and plainly in a Hong Kong fast becoming a haven to artists fleeing the wartorn mainland. *National Heroine*’s plot concerned a Chinese woman who enrolls in the military to prove that women, like men, are vital to defending the motherland. Counting *Sum Hun* as a “national defence” work too, that brings two films of the genre to Esther’s credit as either producer or director.

But she wanted to explore other aspects of cinema, her new professional medium. Despite warm local reviews for her debut, she apparently doubted her own future in Hong Kong whose twice-monthly film periodical, *Artland* (#11, 1937) profiled her thus under

a headline, “First Female Director of China”:

“Ms Esther Eng to return to the US. Ms Esther, the world’s first Chinese female director and who lives in San Francisco, US, is becoming famous in both the Chinese and American film industries for the film she directed (sic) last year - *Iron Blood, Fragrant Soul*, starring Wai Kim-fong. The movie was noticed and well regarded. Later, Ms Esther came here to her motherland with Ms Wai. She was ambitious and planning to further her career as director in the Southern Chinese film industry. Thus she began on *National Heroine*. Unexpectedly though, since Ms Esther used to live in America, her perceptions and ideas were very different. So her films were considered too highbrow for local audiences. This placed her in a difficult situation; she planned to return by ship to the US in the middle of next month to utilise what she learned here for her film career back there. Ms Esther is a very talented woman. We know that what is not well appreciated here would no doubt be well recognized in the US. Nobody knows yet how far her career will take her. Where there is a will, there is a way. May she not lose faith in herself.”<sup>30</sup>

2. *100,000 Lovers* (8 March 1938), solo director; scripted by Yu Kei-ping

Mr. Joseph Sunn Jue of “Grandview” apparently liked what he

saw in *National Heroine* for he produced Esther's second feature, *100,000 Lovers*. Once again her "fetish" leading actor, Wai Kim-fong, starred, with the film featuring many from the supporting cast of *National Heroine* – a good safety net – including regular "bad guy" Chow Chi-sing, and comedians Yee Chau-shui and Yeung Kwan-hap. Yee was so popular for his Charlie Chaplin impressions that his character was named "Chaplin" in this film and he would play in Esther's next, *Tragic Love* (below). *100,000 Lovers* opened in Hong Kong on March 8, 1938.<sup>31</sup>

The film's plot description oddly evokes the often-filmed novels and short stories of American "noir" writer Cornell Woolrich (aka William Irish), HKFA's filmography outlining it thus:

"Chan Chi-kong (actor Ng Cho-fan), a lowly employee, leaves his village to pursue a better life in the city. There, Chan meets dance-hall girl Cheung Mei-mei, social butterfly Ho Ma-lei, and Lee Wan-ching (Lam Mui-mui), the daughter of a company director. Despite his relationships with these women, Chi-kong remains unfulfilled and summons his wife, Wong Suk-hing (Wai Kim-fong), to join him. However, Wan-ching tempts Chi-kong with a manager's job provided he marries her. So Chi-kong orders wife Suk-hing back to their village. Heartbroken, she misses her ship and so escapes death from the ship's subsequent, well-publicised accident at sea.

Suk-hing fakes news of her death and returns to the city disguised as a singer named ‘Lang-yuet’. Meanwhile, Mei-mei kills Ma-lei by mistake then is brought to court and sentenced to imprisonment. On the day of Chi-kong’s marriage to Wan-ching, his mother discovers that Wan-ching is, in fact, Chi-kong’s sister. Suk-hing reveals her true identity to Chi-kong. The two reconcile and return to the village to devote their lives to educating children.” According to *Artland* (#25, 1 March 1938), this film, Esther’s second HK feature, was “the most relaxed among recent works produced by Grandview Film Company and is also the company’s first made by Esther Eng, the woman director, who has joined it. Her techniques are quite exquisite...”<sup>32</sup>

Despite the film’s comic title and “Chaplin” character, *Filmography Vol I* classifies it as “Contemporary/Didactic.”

3. *Tragic Love* aka *Switch* (15 Nov. 1938), solo director; scripted by Yu Kei-ping

*Filmography, Vol I* summarises the film (considered “lost”) as follows:

“This is a story about a couple of young lovers who marry despite the opposition of their parents. The woman becomes pregnant but is later abandoned by her husband as he strays into

an affair with another woman. At the end of her mental tether, she commits suicide by taking poison.” The principal stars were Leong Suet-fei (f) and Lo Duen (m) who was a director in his own right.

Law Kar, when interviewed by Louisa Wei for her film, *Golden Gate Girls* aka *Golden Gate*, *Silver Light* (HK, 2013), recorded this comment: “*Tragic Love* is about the triangular relationship between one man and two women. It was also a social satire, written by a famous writer, Yu Kei-ping. The film was also shot in the Shaws’ Nanyang Film Studio. In the middle of its production, Esther fell ill. She had malaria, which sometimes deteriorated but, she insisted on working in the film studio until she couldn’t.”

4. *Night of Romance, a Lifetime of Regret* (20 November 1938), co-directed. with Leong Wai-man & Wu Pang; scripted by Fung Fung-kor

As outlined in *Filmography, Vol. I*: “Ng Cho-fan [leading actor] has a night of romance with Pak Yin [principal actress], makes her pregnant then abandons her. Pak resorts to prostitution and is separated from her son. Ng finally realizes his wrongs and tries to make amends but too late. Though reunited with her son in the end, Pak dies, her heart filled with grief.”

To cite an early script of Louisa Wei’s film, *Golden Gate Girls*

(HK, 2013): “So begins the protagonist’s life overwhelmed by discrimination and hardship - a tragedy that genuinely touched audiences of its time.”

5. *It’s a Women’s World* aka *The 36 Amazons* (1 February, 1939), co-directed/co-scripted with Lo Si

This must be the most ambitious of her films given its advance-warning annoucenenents in twice-monthly film periodical *Artland* for at least 8 and a half months(!), i.e., from as early as the issue of May 15, 1938, until the film’s HK premiere on February 1, 1939. *It’s a Women’s World*, with its ensemble of 36 major female stars, makes it the most important for recovery because its evident ambitions dwarf those of the rest – happily, we can now confirm that a script held by the NYSA, entitled *The Women’s World*, is indeed for this film.

*Filmography Vol. I* says: “*It’s a Women’s World* features 36 female stars playing a variety of female characters: an old-fashioned teacher; a dressy clerk; a smart journalist; an upright lawyer; a doctor who advocates body-building; a dance hall girl leading a befuddled life; a social butterfly who leads a dissipated life; and a pathetic abandoned wife who worries about making ends meet. The various situations of the characters reflect the social problems faced by women in real life. [It] is the first Hong Kong film to feature an all-female cast.”

It does post-date another contender for very “first film” in this category in Hollywood’s *The Mad Parade* (US, 1931). Negatively received then by *Variety* (22 September 1931) for its “Story thin, dialog rough” and directed by William Beaudine, *Mad Parade* concerns nine American women stationed close to the Allied front line in France after the US had entered World War I.<sup>33</sup>

Since her arrival in Hong Kong on June 4, 1936, the territory’s Chinese press had written about Esther in awe, covering her ups and downs as a film artist and, disarmingly, her “intimate” life with two actresses through 1936-1939, never with terms like “lesbian” or “gay” nor raising, to my reading, any whiff of “scandal”. Her affairs, business or romantic, were all part of the package of one who insisted on being called “Ha Go” (brother Ha) even by her intimates, and who adopted (they say) “male” traits in her walk, her clothing and her emotions. Ha Go was from Hollywood. Ha Go was good copy!

#### WARTIME: Hong Kong cinema goes to San Francisco

Between 1933 and 1939, the Grandview film company moved its principal creative activity from San Francisco to Hong Kong. Then, according to historian Law Kar, “Grandview would make some several American features from 1939 to 1945 – thirty or so according



to recent research by Dr. Han Yanli – catering to Chinese-American audiences even as it lost other outlets (including Hong Kong) for the duration of the Pacific War. Some were 16mm and in color, others 35mm and in black & white; all had Cantonese soundtracks. For the first time, numerous films by Chinese filmmakers were faithfully representing the lives of Chinese living in America. [...] None were fantastical or historical; they simply represented the Chinese at home, taking a realistic approach.”

Marion Wong could only look on in envy.

## US Epilogue

Such is the slight glimpse only of the formation of a remarkable film woman. Limited space here precludes more than a list of her remaining features through 1941-1961. Their full details, her post 1939 letters, so many more of the photos she preserved, and overviews of the scripts she transformed into films, and more, are all for a later work. One can draw on her photo collection alone for insights into her films, from the solo portraits of her as an older adult mixing with family, personal friends and film workers in the 1960s back to the baby-faced teenager and her affectionate photos/cards to and from young female friends. The latter includes the very sad lament in our 17 year-old future-director’s “Memories of a dear friend Miss Frances Lee – died – February 29, 1932” accompanied by (presumably) her own

illustration, white on black, perhaps copied from a classic – a boat, a small lake, background mountains and trees - to reinforce the classic Tang Dynasty poem she chose for Frances:

Poem for Frances Lee (...Tang Dynasty poem by Wang Wei)  
After rain the deserted mountains  
You can feel the autumn in the evening,  
The moon shining on pines, the stream running clear  
Over the stones; the laundry girl sings in the bamboo grove  
And lotuses move as the fisherman's boat passes.  
Spring has gone, but noble young men are hesitant to leave.<sup>34</sup>

### Post Hong Kong films

6. *Golden Gate Girl* (US, San Francisco premiere: 15 May 1941, Grandview Theater, 756 Jackson Street)

"Wern" liked it (*Variety*, May 28, 1941): "Story is easy to follow and is loaded with familiar scenes around Frisco, particularly Chinatown, but also the Waterfront, Golden Gate Park, etc. [...] Other exploitable angles include the fact that the director is China's only woman film director...". However, Kwan Man-ching – writer, editor and actor in this film - has claimed sole director credit for himself. That issue remains contentious.

7. *The Blue Jade* (1947) aka *Fair Lady of the Blue Lagoon* (HK rel. March 6, 1949)

Starring Siu Fei Fei (Fe Fe Lee) with her regular leading man, Liu kei-wai - the Chinese-American “Technicolor King – both co-starring in this and Esther’s next two films.

8. *Back Street* (1948)

Made in February 1948, its title, *Too Late for Springtime*, changed to *Back Street* in homage to Hollywood's 1932 and 1942 film versions of American Fannie Hurst’s 1931 novel of that name.

According to *Screen Voice* #147 - “only Chinese Movie Monthly Magazine in Malaya” - dated 15 July 1949: [The film] is the second romantic movie by Ng Kam-ha. Siu Fei Fei as a young Chinese flower seller meets a Chinese-American banker (Liu Kei-wai) in San Francisco, [the movie charting] their repeated separations and constant rekindling of their passion in a way that is quite moving [...] From every point of view – whether storyline, colour, settings, lighting or sound – the production bears comparison with the best of Hollywood.<sup>35</sup>

9. Hawaii’s *Mad Fire Mad Love* (US. 1949), solo director

A must-find, must-see colour film made entirely in Hawaii in 1948 with a limited international release in 1949-50. Singapore's Chinese newspaper *Nanyang Siang Pau* advertises it as playing for 3 days - October 24-26 – in 1950.

10. *Murder in New York Chinatown* (US, 1961), co-director credit with Wu Pang

The intriguing background to this “comeback” movie for director Esther Eng is told in some detail in the film, *Golden Gate Girls* (dir. Louisa Wei, HK, 2013). As to who predominated as director – herself in New York or Wu Pang in Hong Kong – that matter also remains contentious.

### Fade out ...

Failing a snappy two-liner like Walter Winchell's as a quick get-out, we draw from another movie maverick, the better known Joseph “von” Sternberg, nicely projecting the “just do it!” attitude with which Esther Eng forged one of Chinese cinema's most extraordinary, if under-developed careers:

In a 1966 interview, touching on “teaching” directorial vision to film students, Mr. von Sternberg told British historian Kevin

Brownlow: “I propose some absolutely horrible qualifications [...] He must know the languages. He must know the history of the theatre from the beginning of time. He must be an expert at psycho-analysis [with] some psychiatric training. He must know every emotion.

“And they say ‘Did you do this?’ And I say. ‘No, but then I never asked anyone how to become a director.’”<sup>36</sup>

Frank Bren, is an Australian actor, playwright and producer who has undertaken serious research work on Hong Kong cinema history since the 1990s. He co-wrote *Hong Kong Cinema - A Cross-Cultural View* together with Law Kar and Sam Ho for Scarecrow Press (US, 2004). He also spent years researching the life and film career of Esther Eng as documented in 'Blind Spot: Looking for Esther Eng' (*FilmArt*, no 309, Beijing, April, 2006) and elsewhere. His research on Wan Hoi-ling, early Chinese woman filmmaker, is equally long-term.

I am grateful to the following for crucial personal/institutional help: Winnie Fu, Law Kar, Ian Ward, Louisa Wei, Alex Zhang Boyuan – all for English translations of the original Chinese; Arthur Dong, Don Marion, David Wells, Wong Han-min, Yeung Bick-har // AFI Research Collection (RMIT University, Melbourne); East Asian Collection (Melbourne University Library); Hong Kong University Library's Special Collections section; Hong Kong Film Archive; Hong Kong Central Library; State Library of Victoria – for far more than its making ancestry.com available there from 2004; other acknowledgments are in the end-notes.

## Postscript 1 – Anne Kerlan

This essay could never have appeared without Anne Kerlan - author, editor, historian and friend - a researcher at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique in Paris. She is currently researching the histories of China and Chinese cinema at the Institut d'histoire du temps présent. She is also writing a book on China's great Lianhua studio, active in 1920s' &

1930s' Hong Kong and (principally) Shanghai.

As an independent editor, she commissioned and encouraged this article together with essays by other writers on the history of Chinese cinema. The whole, translated into French, was to have appeared in a "Chinese film" special published by a French periodical but profound differences in approach between her editorial principles and those of the periodical sadly made that impossible. Her Chinese film "special" will appear in future (date yet to be advised). To her, my many thanks.

### For further reference:

#### ELECTRONIC:

Interactive websites on Chinese film history – well-illustrated, well-researched and fun:

Marion: Don Marion's [www.chinesemirror.com](http://www.chinesemirror.com)

Wells: David Wells' [www.softfilm.blogspot.com](http://www.softfilm.blogspot.com)

Yang: Zi Yu Yang's [www.hsiamoon.blog.163.com](http://www.hsiamoon.blog.163.com) and [www.chinesecinemagoldenage.blogspot.com/](http://www.chinesecinemagoldenage.blogspot.com/)

#### FILM:

*Golden Gate Girls* (HK, 2013) – feature-length documentary on the life of filmmaker Esther Eng – written and directed by Louisa Shiyu Wei, produced by Law Kar & Louisa Wei, co-presented by Hong Kong Arts Development Council together with Blue Queen Cultural Communication Ltd.

*Hollywood Chinese: The Chinese in American Feature Films* (US, 2007), written and directed by Arthur Dong, presented by Deep Focus Productions Inc. – an important overview of Chinese-Americans and of the Chinese as a whole, both as a people perceived by "Hollywood" (North American) films, and as artists (actors, writers & directors) creatively working in same. See: [www.hollywoodchinese.com](http://www.hollywoodchinese.com)

## Notes

1. PHOTOS used in this essay, where not otherwise described, belong to the joint “Esther Eng Photo Collection” and its ultimate co-proprietors James Wong & Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA). By special permission from the co-proprietors, individual projects by Louisa Wei, Law Kar and Frank Bren may use images from that collection (as here) but no other person or entity may exploit any images seen here from that collection, without express permission by the two co-proprietors named above.
2. The other is Wan Hoi-ling. See *Newsletter* #65, August 2013, p.10-15, published by HKFA and available online at HKFA’s website.
3. This is according to “*Film Censorship in New York State*” an essay by Richard Andress (“former archivist at the New York State Archives”) found online by using the above italicized phrase.
4. That first golden age is arguably through 1936-1941.
5. Walter Winchell, “Broadway and Elsewhere”, *Pharos-Tribune* (Logansport, Indiana, US), September 14, 1959, page 4 (via newspaperarchive.com).
6. Wong Howe’s friendship with Esther and his “helping hand” are points well made by filmmaker Louisa Wei in an early script she allowed me to read of her new film, *Golden Gate Girls* (HK, 2013).
7. McLaughlin, Kathleen, *The New York Times*, June 29, 1967, p.67.
8. Details of the 1931 “Mukden Incident” are easily accessed online and elsewhere.
9. See: Lee, Clark, *They Call it the Pacific*, The Viking Press, New York, US, 1943, p.45, paragraph 2.
10. According to the present IMDB entry online, *The Women’s* US premiere date was September 1, 1939.
11. *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 5, 1930, p.4. For confirming those details, thanks to David Wells. Curiously, the photograph shows an erroneous handwritten date of February 5, 1931.
12. Soule, Frank (with contributions by John H. Gihon and James Nisbet): *Annals of San Francisco*, containing a summary of the history of the first discovery, settlement, progress and present condition of California, and a complete history of all the events connected with its great city: to



- which are added, biographical memoirs of some prominent citizens. Published by D. Appleton, New York, 1855. Sourced: State Library of Victoria [SLV] call no. MC 979.4 S08.
13. *Chinese Theatres in America* (3 volumes) by Peter Chu, Lois M. Foster, Nadia Lavrova, and Steven C. Moy – supervised and edited by Cyrilla P. Lindner - published by Bureau of Research, Federal Theatre Project, United States, 1936. Its three volumes are available at the San Francisco Public Library, California, USA. Call no. 792 079F317c (vol.1,2 and 3).
  14. See also <http://persephonemagazine.com/2011/06/badass-ladies-of-history-marion-wong/>. For the Chinese name of Marion Wong, in the US, at least one government record, like those used online by Ancestry.com (without ever using Chinese character names), romanises her Chinese name as "Wong Wan-nee" while her grand nephew, Professor Gregory Mark, romanises her Chinese name as Wong Nui Hi, as taken by him from the Immigration and Naturalization case files from The National Archives and Records Administration, Regional Archives, Pacific Region San Francisco, San Bruno, California. [Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944 Case file no. 11096/14285].
  15. In 2004, Arthur Dong, still preparing his feature, *Hollywood Chinese* (US, 2007), obtained surviving footage of *The Curse of Quon Gwon* (US, 1916/17) in 35mm and 16mm – comprising much of the original feature.
  16. Kwan Man-ching, *Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema* (in Chinese), Hong Kong: Wide Angle Press Ltd., 1976, p.72–76.
  17. See note 16, p.143.
  18. With thanks to Law Kar. This draws on his research on the preceding two paragraphs as it did in our collaborative book (with Sam Ho), *Hong Kong Cinema: a Cross Cultural View* (Scarecrow Press, US, 2004).
  19. Wai Kim-fong, identified as “actress”, aged 19 and born in Macao, left Hong Kong aboard the SS Empress of Canada (aka Princess Marguerite) on September 7, 1933. She was under an employment bond to the Mandarin Theatre, San Francisco, and arrived at Seattle, Washington, on 30 Sept 1933 where she was cleared to enter the US on October 2 before going on to San Francisco. Source Citation: National Archives and Records Administration, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Seattle District, Chinese Passenger Arrival and Disposition Volumes, 1903-1944, Arrival District: Seattle, Washington, Arrival Date Range: May 2, 1933 - May 29,

1934. Source Information: Ancestry.com. North Dakota and Washington, Chinese Passenger Arrivals, 1903-1944 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Original data: Immigration and Naturalization Service, Seattle District, Chinese Passenger Arrival and Disposition Volumes, 1903-1944. NARA Microfilm Publication ARC 646080, 41 vol. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85. National Archives, Washington, D.C.[Kim arr Seattle Wash 30 Sept].
20. Their script, as originally submitted in both English and Chinese to the New York State censorship office, is now held at the New York State Archives in Albany, NY. *Sum Hun* is an effective tear-jerker, even to read!
  21. From a copy derived from Paul Ivano's personal papers held at AMPAS' Margaret Herrick Library in Beverly Hills, California. Thanks to Elaine Mae Woo who sent the copy to me.
  22. Esther confirms this story in *Artland* #55, 1 June 1939. The story makes clear that: (1) she showed *Artland*'s reporter her actual script of *The Good Earth* (US, 1937) only given out by MGM to those actually cast; (2) she regretted her missed opportunity to appear in that film.
  23. *Chinese Digest* at this time was a weekly in English and published by the Chinese Cultural Society of America.
  24. Small wonder that Betty Cornelius, a decade hence, will declare, with some exaggeration: "Still in her teens, with no background for such a venture, Esther went to Hollywood, rented a studio in Sunset Boulevard and made her first picture for Chinese markets here and in China." - Betty Cornelius, *Seattle Times*, June 9, 1946.
  25. Source: Ancestry.com. California, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1957 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2008. Original data: Registers of Persons Held for Boards of Special Inquiry at the San Francisco, California, Immigration Office, February 1910-May 1941; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1388, 4 rolls); Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, RG 85; National Archives, Washington, D.C. Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at San Francisco, 1893-1953; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1410, 429 rolls); Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, RG 85; National Archives, Washington, D.C.
  26. Accessed via Newspaperarchive.com.
  27. Translation by Alex Zhang Bouyuan.

28. *Hong Kong Filmography, Vol. I, 1913-1941*, ed. Mary Wong, Hong Kong Film Archive, HK, 1997.
29. The above paragraph is drawn, with my thanks, from Law Kar's independent research.
30. *Artland* #11 (HK), 11 July 1937, translation by Alex Zhang Bouyuan.
31. See for example a 9 March, 1938, advertisement for *100,000 Lovers* in the amusements section of *Kung Sheung Daily News*. Thanks to Law Kar for the "Chaplin" anecdote.
32. From the Chinese, transl. by Alex Zhang Bouyuan.
33. *The American Film Institute Catalog – Feature Films 1931-1940*, ed. University of California Press (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford), 1993, p.1274.
34. Translation by Ian Ward.
35. Translation by Ian Ward.
36. *FILM*, The Magazine of the Federation of Film Societies, Number 45. Spring 1966, Woking, Surrey U.K. p.10.



# 男裝女導演：伍錦霞 與桃樂西·阿茲納的傳奇<sup>1</sup>

—— 魏時煜

二十世紀七十年代中，當美國的女性主義學者重新發現桃樂西·阿茲納（Dorothy Arzner，1897-1979）時，他們感到這個發現的意義非同一般。首先，這位「荷里活黃金時代」的「唯一女導演」，並非一閃而過的流星，她在片場足足打拼了24年。其間16年她作為導演，替荷里活八大製片廠中的五家都拍過電影。<sup>2</sup> 阿茲納於1943年退出影壇後，被電影和評論圈遺忘多年，直到1975年1月美國導演協會才向這位協會首名女性成員舉辦致敬活動。此前不久，阿茲納剛剛接受了兩位學者的訪談，由此引起學術界重視，認為對她的忽略是美國電影史的嚴重遺漏，各種深入的研究也隨之展開。其次，阿茲納的16部導演作品，從類型上來說都屬於「女性電影」，給女性主義研究者們提供了重要參照。因為銀幕女性一向都由男性主導，究竟女導演塑造的女性角色是否更加真實、豐富和複雜？如果沒有女導演的作品，根本無從說起。另外因為阿茲納的導演作品大多留存於世，讓學者們有機會仔細閱讀。比阿茲納入

圖一 1938年，伍錦霞在南洋片場。  
Fig 1 Esther Eng in Nanyang Film Studio, 1938.



行晚16年的美籍華裔女導演伍錦霞（1914-70），在華語電影史中的地位堪與阿茲納媲美。從1937到1949年12年間，她是活躍於華語影圈中的女導演，作品也都圍繞女性人物展開。伍錦霞最為活躍的時期是中日戰爭時期，惜其影片大多遺失，相關資料也留存甚少，因此重新發掘伍錦霞歷史的過程相對艱難而緩慢。

伍錦霞曾經被海內外報刊稱為「中國第一位女導演」，但是她在1970年去世後，很快被遺忘。1995年荷里活業內雜誌《綜藝》的首席影評人陶德·麥卡錫偶然間發現了伍錦霞的生平，撰文聲稱，這是一位「就連最勤奮的女性主義史學家和中國通們的雷達，都沒有偵測到的亞洲女導演。」<sup>3</sup> 麥卡錫的說法激勵了電影學者羅卡和法蘭賓的進一步研究，兩人在2004年出版的《香港電影跨文化觀》一書發表了〈伍錦霞的傳奇〉一章，首次較為完整地書寫了其生平與作品。<sup>4</sup> 後來兩位研



圖二 1927年，桃樂西·阿茲納導演的首部默片《艷女新裝》。

Fig 2 Dorothy Arzner directing her first silent film *Fashions for Women*, 1927.

究者還分別為不同書刊撰文，繼續書寫這位女導演。羅卡在2012年的文章中總結說，「如果伍錦霞生活在今天，她毫無疑問會被當成是跨民族電影、女性主義電影、反戰電影製作的先驅人物。」<sup>5</sup> 羅卡和筆者於2013年聯合監製、由筆者導演的紀錄長片《金門銀光夢》，試圖更深入地發掘伍錦霞在美籍華裔史、世界電影史、特別是二戰文化史中的重要性。<sup>6</sup>

因為現有的美國和華語電影史都沒有包括伍錦霞的記述，筆者希望論證她的重要性。本文嘗試比較伍錦霞和桃樂西·阿茲納，審視這兩位在三、四十年代分別在香港和荷里活被眾多媒體關注的「唯一女導演」，是否有類似或不同的境遇。<sup>7</sup> 筆者相信，伍錦霞和阿茲納的很多行為方式和創作方法都曾被作為「特例」而忽視，如果認識到兩人之間的「共通性」，我們應該可以更加深刻地認識她們的「特性」。因此下文將圍繞三個問題討論：1) 她們如何成為導演，並且持續導演生涯超過十年？2) 媒體如何報道她們？3) 如何看待她們創作的女性電影以及她們在女導演脈絡中的重要性？



## 戰爭給了她們機會

伍錦霞和阿茲納均出生在美國加州舊金山的富裕家庭，都受過良好的中學教育，並且在少女時代觀看過很多粵劇或歌劇，以及無數電影。除了兩人從事電影工作的熱情、天份和決心，戰爭也給了她們機會；因為從事電影行業，不僅對女性，就算對大多數男性來說，也頗難入行。阿茲納在一戰結束後不久，就開始在派拉蒙影業公司的前身——拉斯基製片廠——以抄寫員的身份入行，到二戰結束前不久退出影圈。伍錦霞的電影事業在中日戰爭中開始，到1949年國共內戰結束前夕結束。戰爭有時會賦予女性特殊的機會、責任與地位，這一點在阿茲納與伍錦霞的年代，有兩個最為典型的例子：一是在中國長大的美國作家賽珍珠，二是中國國民政府的第一夫人宋美齡。她們在二戰期間，分別蜚聲於世界文壇和政壇，一個獲得諾貝爾文學獎，一個被稱作權利最大的女性，成為萬眾仰望的對象。但是戰爭一旦結束，兩人的榮耀與光環幾乎立刻就消失，並且不復重來。<sup>8</sup> 阿茲納和伍錦霞電影事業的起落，也與戰爭有着必然的聯繫。

阿茲納的父親在荷里活擁有一家餐廳，她少年時就見過很多舞台和銀幕的明星。儘管她曾經習醫，但是暑期實習讓她打消了做醫生的念頭。她曾打趣說想學耶穌「救死扶傷，但是希望可以瞬間治癒，而且不做手術不用藥物。」<sup>9</sup> 阿茲納在訪談

中這樣描述她如何首次得到片場的工作：

「那是一戰後不久，各行各業都開始復甦，甚至連給嬰兒拍照的影樓都紛紛開業。有人幫我約見了威廉德美，告訴他我是一個聰明的女孩。那時候因為流感讓很多人病倒，片場需要人手。即便是沒有工作經驗，只要稍微有才能或知識的人也有可能獲得機會。」<sup>10</sup>

威廉德美那時候是拉斯基製片廠的製作總管，他建議阿茲納到各個部門參觀一下。阿茲納參觀大導演施素德美的拍片現場後立刻得出結論：「要在電影界工作，就要做導演，因為大家都聽導演的。事實上，導演就是整部電影。」<sup>11</sup> 阿茲納提到的「流感」也叫「西班牙流感」，是到歐洲參加一戰的美國士兵帶回美國的。這場流感造成的片場人員短缺，也讓兩位華裔青年加入了荷里活：黃宗霑起先只是在片場負責打板，但很快升任為施素德美的攝影師；黃柳霜則在扮演過幾個小角色之後，一躍成為《海逝》（1922）的女主角，並從此成為全球知名的亞裔明星。

具有諷刺意義的是，在電影起步的前三十年，女性做導演並不像後來那麼少見。默片時代的美國曾經有過十多位女導演，其中愛麗絲·佳·布蘭琪和露易絲·韋伯都是片場女皇，每人名下都有幾百部影片。到1929年前後，荷里活開始全面

進入有聲片製作的黃金時期，只有阿茲納一位女性保全了導演的職位。一直到她退休，她都是荷里活唯一的女導演。她通過奮鬥獲得成功的故事多次被報刊報道：她在拉斯基用了七年時間一路從抄寫員、場記、剪接、副導演，終於做到了導演的位置，但此前她已經參與了五十多部影片的製作。1926年，獨立電影公司哥倫比亞邀請她做導演。在她準備離開工作了七年的拉斯基時，她覺得應該找「要人」談話後再離開，沒想到公司高層決定挽留，讓她導演高成本的A級片。第二天的報紙上就登出「拉斯基任命女性作導演。」<sup>12</sup>不久，阿茲納導演的默片《艷女新裝》（1927）獲得好評。兩年後她又導演了第一部聲片《狂野派對》（1929），成功完成了從默片到聲片的轉型。其早期導演作品的成功，讓她能夠在拉斯基改組後的「派拉蒙影業公司」持續工作到1932年。在離開派拉蒙之前，阿茲納經歷了一伏一起：1931年她的最後一部作品《女職員》遭受到評論和票房的雙重失敗，但是1932年她執導的《寒濤儼影》一片，則被稱為當年最為成功的電影之一。<sup>13</sup>因為種種因素，阿茲納同年離開了派拉蒙，成為當時為數不多的獨立簽約導演。她獲得的第一個合約，就是導演嘉芙蓮協賓主演、雷電華製作的《情天飛絮》（1933）。阿茲納其後執導了五部電影，最終在1943年離開荷里活。

我們不確定伍錦霞在少女時代是否看過阿茲納的電影。如果伍錦霞知道阿茲納的存在，她可能會受到《情天飛絮》一片



圖三 伍錦霞和韋劍芳1936年春在雷電華片廠門口合影。（伍錦屏提供）

Fig 3 Esther Eng and Wai Kim-fong in front of RKO Studio, 1936. (courtesy of Sally Ng)

的影響，因為此片的女主角是一位飛行員，事業騰飛時愛上了有婦之夫，最後因為有了身孕、又不能與愛人結合而自殺了斷。伍錦霞熱愛航空，她的前兩部影片的主人公分別是一位男飛行員和一位女飛行員。<sup>14</sup> 此外，伍錦霞相冊裏有一張她和女演員韋劍芳於1936年春天，在雷電華片廠門口拍攝的照片，也說明雷電華在她心中有特殊的位置。

伍錦霞的妹妹伍錦屏在2009年接受筆者的訪問時曾經說，伍錦霞曾經在離家不遠的大舞臺戲院賣票，為的是能看到更多電影。她的電影教育，主要就是通過觀看成百上千的荷里活電影。儘管伍錦霞曾經對幕前演出感興趣，並似乎參加了美高梅公司《大地》一片的選角，但她並沒有像其他人一樣等待通知，因為另一個拍片的機會來了。到香港以後，她收到不少銀

幕演出的邀請，但最終都被她婉拒。香港的《藝林》雜誌中有報導稱，她不希望自己的演技被另一位導演來斷定優劣。此文還說，她曾答應演出南粵影片公司《西廂記》中的紅娘一角，但是筆者沒有找到其他文獻佐證此說法。<sup>15</sup>

1933年，早期影人關文清帶着黎民偉組織拍攝的紀錄片《十九路軍抗日血戰史》（1932）來到加州，在各個華埠放映後，激起當地華人極大的愛國熱情。伍錦霞的父親，三藩市僑商伍于澤與友人，決定投資拍攝一部愛國電影，也就是伍錦霞參加拍攝的首部電影《心恨》（1936）。他們成立了光藝聲片公司，不久又把公司的英文名稱改為Cathay Pictures Ltd.，公司的註冊地址正是伍錦霞的家庭住址：舊金山華盛頓街1010號。<sup>16</sup> 公司股東們請伍錦霞和一位叫Bruce Wong的年青人聯合監製《心恨》。《西雅圖時報》的記者貝蒂·柯乃麗絲這樣描述了伍錦霞的首次電影製作：

「1936年，當她在加州遇到一位著名的中國女演員時，她決定製作一部影片。她讓行內那些比她年長和資深的人驚訝。還不到二十歲，她就在（荷里活的）日落大道租借了片廠，為本地（美國華埠）和中國的華語片市場，拍攝了她的第一部電影。」<sup>17</sup>

柯乃麗絲婚後改名貝蒂·博文，並成為推介女性藝術家的



圖四 1935年，韋劍芳扮演  
《心恨》女主角。

Fig 4 Wai Kim-fong plays the  
female lead in *Heartaches*, 1935.

積極份子。她在《西雅圖時報》上的這篇報導，是我們唯一可以確知是女性記者執筆的報導，文中對於伍錦霞的成就，給予了相當充分的肯定。

當《心恨》在荷里活製作時，1935年12月5日出版的《洛杉磯時報》發了一篇消息，提到這部「在荷里活完成配音的第一部東方電影」進展速度「飛快」：

「28歲的導演唐棣忠，以及Henry Tung，共同獲得了舊金山的資金，聯合編劇、導演，並在八天之內完成了拍攝。片長九本（大約90-110分鐘），其中兩本用彩色膠片拍攝。全片基本是時裝，除了用彩色拍攝的兩本，特別把傳統戲服的美感表現出來。」<sup>18</sup>

這篇文章中提到，劇組租借的是「信譽片廠」，但是沒有提到伍錦霞的名字，這可能是因為當時報紙發電影消息時很少



圖五 1935年，黃悲露扮演《心恨》男主角。

Fig 5 Beal Wong plays the male lead in *Heartaches*, 1935.



提到製片的名字。但是最少有兩項文獻資料可證明伍錦霞曾參與《心恨》的製作。一，她收藏的相片當中，有兩張劇組工作人員的合影，她都在相當中心的位置上。她還擁有兩張大尺寸相片，是她的好友、《心恨》女主角韋劍芳在拍攝現場與美國演員和導演唐棣忠等人的工作照。二，在三藩市出版、針對華人社區的英語雜誌《華人文摘》，在宣佈《心恨》在大舞臺劇院首映日期時也寫到：

「《心恨》的出品人是關以倫（音譯），製片是伍錦霞和 Bruce Wong，攝影是保羅伊萬諾，歌利亞史允臣以前最好的攝影師。故事和導演由唐棣忠和 Henry Tung 一起完成。觀眾一定會被這部特別的電影打動。除了女主角外，劇中其餘角色均由美籍華人扮演。伍小姐和韋小姐不久後會動身前往中國，為她們的下一部電影尋找明星。她們將在中國逗留兩個月。《心恨》之後還會在新加坡放映。」<sup>19</sup>

我們並不清楚為甚麼《心恨》要由「伍小姐和韋小姐」帶回中國，但對於伍錦霞來說，原本計劃兩個月的行程，後來變成在香港三年零四個月的停留。

伍錦霞和韋劍芳於1936年6月4日到達香港。50多家電影公司和當地媒體為她們召開了歡迎會。根據《玫瑰》雜誌的記者殘香的報道，兩人都應邀演講，伍錦霞介紹了《心恨》的拍攝：

「略稱小妹留美時，感覺國片沒落，少數輸入，顧欲提倡祖國藝術於彼邦，遂有此片之拍攝。小妹向留美邦，未悉能迎合國人之心理否，擬於他日繼續拍攝適合國人心理之片。」<sup>20</sup>

殘香顯然不知道韋劍芳小時候在中國生活，因而誇獎她中文流利。《洛杉磯時報》雖然知道韋劍芳從中國來，卻錯誤地把她稱為中國來的「片廠明星」，其實在此之前，韋劍芳只主演過關文清導演的粵劇紀錄片《三娘教子》。<sup>21</sup> 殘香驚訝於伍錦霞與記者問答之圓滑，而令筆者印象深刻的是，她一到香港，就這樣直接了當地表明了拍片的願望；但更令人欽佩的是，不久後她真的把願望付諸行動。

根據《南強日報》的廣告，《心恨》於1936年6月30日在皇后戲院首映之前，已經改名為《鐵血芳魂》。此間，伍錦霞的名字出現在香港各大中英文報章上，她被稱為「一部荷里活電



圖六 1937年，龐山笑主演了《民族女英雄》。

Fig 6 Kwong San-siu plays the male lead in *National Heroine*, 1937.



影的監製」。荷里活的光環對於當時香港影壇的作用，可以從一則《鐵血芳魂》的廣告中看到。廣告說影片「創國片五大記錄：第一部五彩顏色的、第一部在荷里活製、第一部有劇烈空戰、第一部在歐美公映、第一部在荷里活大戲院公映。」<sup>22</sup> 這些宣傳推波助瀾，加上影片在本來專映西片的皇后劇院首映，都幫助《鐵血芳魂》取得良好的票房成績；但是影片能夠前後放映一個月，和它的愛國主題也息息相關。1936年，中日之間的全面戰爭蓄勢待發，這部影片的到來正好符合大眾需要。

伍錦霞很快在香港註冊了光藝香港分公司，開拍另一部愛國電影《民族女英雄》（1937）。在《鐵血芳魂》中獲得成功的韋劍芳，理所當然再次出任女主角。從她的角色我們可以看到兩部電影之間的連續性。在《鐵血芳魂》中，她扮演的粵

劇新星芬，為了讓自己的戀人李清能夠學習航空、報效祖國而犧牲了自己的幸福。李清回國後為祖國而戰，成為航空英雄。當他帶着新婚妻子回到舊金山時，芬在孤獨中病倒。最後李清瞭解了芬的犧牲，芬滿足地死在戀人懷中。在《民族女英雄》中，韋劍芳的角色和男性士兵們並肩作戰，對於女性角色來說向前跨越了很大一步。這位女英雄不再是哭哭啼啼的受害者，而是一位保家衛國的戰士。這部影片在當時意義重大，我們應該認識到伍錦霞是拍攝「國防電影」的先驅人物，因為「國防電影」作為戰時特殊的電影類型，要到1938和1939年大批影人從上海南移香港後，才成為華語電影的主流。

《民族女英雄》最令人驚訝的是，它由伍錦霞導演；而這位年僅23歲的女導演，此前只作過一次聯合監製。伍錦霞做導演這個決定似乎十分大膽，甚至是冒險。在荷里活體系中，即便是像阿茲納這樣有才華的導演，也是經過了七年的學徒期才成為導演。1936年首次導演處女作的首位日本女導演坂根田鶴子，也是在松竹公司大導演溝口健二手下，經歷了六年的場記、剪接、副導演的工作，才執起導筒。伍錦霞完全沒有阿茲納和坂根這樣的片場學徒經驗，但她卻獲得了成功。戰時的氣氛當然對於她的愛國影片有一定催生作用。香港婦女會頒發獎狀給伍錦霞，表彰她對於建立女性的正面形象而起到的作用。伍錦霞很高興獲得這張獎狀，她妹妹伍錦屏回憶，這張獎狀在她舊金山老屋的客廳裏懸掛了很多年。

至少有一篇報刊文章證明，伍錦霞初執導筒就表現出不凡的才能。在香港出版、同時報導電影和粵劇兩個圈子的《伶星》雜誌，披露大觀影片公司的首腦趙樹榮（1904-87），看了《民族女英雄》後，認為伍錦霞是一位不可多得的人才。同樣來自三藩市的趙樹榮，當時正在香港組建大觀片廠，同時招募人才。<sup>23</sup> 儘管此前伍錦霞計畫返美招股、以能夠繼續影片製作，但《民族女英雄》成功後，她收到一連串的片廠邀請。<sup>24</sup> 此時她抓住機會，於1937年8月決定留港，首先為大觀導演了《十萬情人》（1938），後來又為天樂公司導演了《妒花風雨》（1938），為大明星導演了《一夜夫妻》（1938），為「我的影片公司」導演了《女人世界》（又名《三十六女天罡》，1939）。在她離港返美之前，她借助香港電影業的第一個繁榮時期，一共導演了五部影片。

## 「唯一女導演」與媒體報導

在各自的環境中，阿茲納和伍錦霞都曾作為「唯一女導演」而受到媒體的特別關注。儘管當時沒有媒體文章比較過這兩位女導演，但是她們的確有很多相似之處。兩人都留着從前額向後梳的短髮，而這個髮型都被形容成「男孩子氣」或者「男性化」。兩人都穿着特別定製的西裝和長褲，「顏色都是白色、灰色和黑色。」她們都喜歡運動裝和平底鞋。<sup>25</sup> 兩人

# Movie Scrapbook

Dorothy Arzner's first position in film studios was as typist. From this she advanced to script-holder, and thence to filmmaker. Impressed by her abilities, Paramount executives offered her a picture to direct. When talkies arrived she directed Clara Bow in "Wild Party," and some of her directorial successes during that period were "Sarah and Son," and "Anybody's Woman." Later she directed Katharine Hepburn in "Christopher Strong," and Anna Sten in "Nana." She is now directing for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.



FIRST WORKED AS  
STENOGRAPHER THEN  
GOT JOB IN STUDIO  
CUTTING ROOM.



SHE OUT VALENTINO'S  
"BLOOD AND SAND"  
AND "COVERED WAGON!"



RECEIVED CHANCE TO  
DIRECT AFTER  
EDITING "OLD  
IRONSIDES!"  
IS ALSO SUCCESSFUL  
FREE LANCE  
WRITER.



DOROTHY ARZNER,  
ONLY WOMAN  
DIRECTOR IN  
THE MOVIES.

圖七 美國報紙以漫畫表現阿茲納成功之路。

Fig 7 Newspaper clipping of Arzner's way to success.

的身形都相對比較嬌小，阿茲納身高1米63，伍錦霞只有1米53左右，這也是兩人都看起來比較年輕的原因。我們可以比較以下對於伍錦霞和阿茲納兩人分別的描述：

「她發亮的藍黑色頭髮梳成男式短髮，穿一條深藍色的褲子，灰白色外套裏面是一件T恤。她戴一隻方形的男性化手錶，錶面數字是鑲鑽的。與此配襯的，是她自己的設計的白金戒指，鑲有一顆梨子形的大鑽石，戴在尾指上。她的面頰輪廓分明，嘴唇線條柔和，看上去只有17歲。因為長相年輕，從拍第一部電影起她就總是被人質疑年齡。她帶着她的第一部影片和片中的明星到達香港時，影片險些被日軍沒收。當需要簽署一份歸還影片的合約時，她被問到是否到達法定年齡。」<sup>26</sup>

「這是一張很好看的臉，充滿生命力；她的皮膚透明而健康，沒有用化妝品；她的眼睛是深邃的藍紫色，長睫毛投下陰影。我不敢去試圖欺騙這雙眼睛。……工作的時候，她穿着剪裁十分合體的花呢西服，一件男式襯衫，打着領帶。襯衫是她向紐約的一家公司成打定製的。她說，只有這身行頭，才適合她在片廠的工作。」<sup>27</sup>

在阿茲納為派拉蒙工作的那些年，報刊中有很多對她的報道。片廠拍攝的宣傳照上，着裝男性化的她和俏麗的女演員對比十分鮮明。儘管報導中都沒有提及她的性傾向，在這些照片中，阿茲納的姿勢似乎總是很權威，而女演員們都有些敬畏地看着她。有一張特別有意思的照片，是女演員嘉麗拉寶坐在她的腿上，兩個人之間的對望也充滿了挑逗。對於阿茲納，影評人會特別關注她與女演員們的工作關係。在對阿茲納早期導演作品的評論中，很多人留意到阿茲納極大地提高了某些新星的演技，並且在評論中對於阿茲納的關注超過了她的女演員。派拉蒙也願意為記者們提供一些片廠「內聞」，以便記者們更加正面地描述這位「唯一女導演」。比如在一個報導中，女記者安·西爾維絲特寫到：「在派拉蒙，有個公開的秘密，就是阿茲納小姐的劇組最為井然有序，而秩序全然出於自律。」<sup>28</sup>

阿茲納作為導演，最為多產的年代就是她在派拉蒙工作的六年，她拍攝了十部電影。在她離開派拉蒙成為簽約導演的十

年中，她只拍攝了六部電影：兩部雷電華的電影，兩部哥倫比亞的電影，還有一部美高梅和一部聯美的電影。沒有了片廠的大傘遮擋，阿茲納的工作中充滿風風雨雨。在她接手的六部影片中，有三部是因為原來指定的導演因故不能完成而臨時換將。出現這樣的情況，通常因為監製和導演意見相左；即便阿茲納接手導演工作，通常也不能完全扭轉局面。在阿茲納的時代，不受僱於某個製片廠，並不意味着更多的創作自由。

此外，即便我們想像女導演應該會得到女性電影從業者的幫助，但事實並非絕對如此，阿茲納曾經說：「沒有人因為我是女人而給我麻煩，但是男人對我的幫助比女人更多。」<sup>29</sup> 三十年代成名的一線女明星嘉芙蓮協賓和鍾歌羅福，都曾經十分期待和女導演阿茲納合作，但是似乎合作的結果都不成功。對於阿茲納和兩位女明星的關係，有很多矛盾的說法。協賓的傳記作者舍麗丹·茱里說，「阿茲納對工作人員要求很高，工作方式比較貴族化，她不喜歡協賓總是在拍攝現場反對她，而為「小人物」說話。」<sup>30</sup> 但是協賓在自傳中寫到，「阿茲納十分有名，導演過很多電影。她穿長褲，我也是。我們一起工作很愉快。」<sup>31</sup> 阿茲納與鍾歌羅福合作的《彈性戀愛》（1937），既沒有獲得好評、也沒有好的票房，最主要的原因是阿茲納在如何塑造女性角色的問題上，與美高梅的首腦路易士·梅耶發生了分歧。但兩位女性最終保持了友誼，到五十年代，鍾歌羅福拍攝百事可樂的廣告時，要求阿茲納親自導



演。<sup>32</sup> 這些性格上、觀念上的矛盾原本在片廠很平常，但是報道「唯一女導演」阿茲納時，就似乎甚麼都與她的性別有關：可謂成也性別、敗也性別。

有關伍錦霞最早的報導，曾出現於三藩市當地的英文報紙上，1930年12月5日有一則圖片消息，文字說明如下：「伍錦霞昨晚率領一支訓練有素的少女鼓樂隊在寶塔節遊行中穿過唐人街，上千名中國孩子參加了活動。」<sup>33</sup> 從她中學時代的很多照片中我們可以看到，從少女時代開始，她就一直是個中心人物。當她到達香港時，她只有22歲，雜誌編輯們經常以非常喜愛的語氣寫到她。從1937到1939年間，《伶星》和《藝林》雜誌密切跟蹤她的動向。二戰後，《伶星》繼續報導她的各種活動，直到1949年。香港影圈對伍錦霞的報導，自始至終都是一面追蹤其電影製作，一面跟蹤她與女演員的關係。與阿茲納相比較，伍錦霞似乎有比較大的創作自由，與女演員們也都保持了相互信任。因為香港影圈的歷史與文化都與荷里活有所不同，香港報刊編輯與記者之關注內容和表達方式亦有所不同。伍錦霞事業開始時，借助了親友開辦的光藝聲片公司，沒有經歷過阿茲納那樣的「奮鬥史」。<sup>34</sup> 正因為伍錦霞既沒有爬升社會階梯的故事，也沒有固定的片廠為她宣傳，有關她的報道常常稱她是天才或者神童。<sup>35</sup>

伍錦霞在香港的公眾形象主要有四個方面。首先，她是愛



圖八 1941年《金門女》，李小龍首次登上銀幕。（伍錦屏提供）

Fig 8 Bruce Lee's first screen appearance in *Golden Gate Girl*, 1941. (courtesy of Sally Ng)

國者。這一點在她完成《鐵血芳魂》和《民族女英雄》之後就已確立，因為兩片都有保家衛國的內容。<sup>36</sup> 1937年夏天日軍攻佔上海後，上海影人南移，華語電影的製作中心也從上海轉移到香港，「國防電影」成為主流。這時候，伍錦霞轉而拍攝社會諷刺劇，但她的名字仍舊出現在各種愛國、救國委員會的名單中。大部份美國公民都在中日開戰後立即離開中國，伍錦霞能夠留在香港拍片，已經被認為是「心繫祖國」的表現。<sup>37</sup> 事實上，她一直停留到1939年10月才離開香港。返美一年後，她為三藩市的大觀公司導演了影片《金門女》。<sup>38</sup> 片中固執守舊的祖父與進步的外孫女從開始時的不能溝通，到後來祖孫和好的情節，契合了中國人要統一戰線、一致對外的願望，而不僅僅表達了影評人麥卡錫所指的「老傳統和新環境」這一個移民電影、文學的母題。<sup>39</sup> 《金門女》這部「意識正確」、「情節感人」的電影可以說是伍錦霞又一次的愛國宣言。<sup>40</sup> 柯乃麗絲的文章中提到這部電影的影響：

「在香港和其他有幸擁有戲院的中國城市，每天都有上千



圖九 1938年《一夜夫妻》海報。  
(羅卡提供)

Fig 9 Poster for *A Night of Romance, A Lifetime of Regret*, 1938. (courtesy of Law Kar)



人排隊，希望看到二戰開始後拍攝的新片。戰前的老片不斷重複放映，大家已爛熟於心。但是中國人渴望新的娛樂，於是擠滿戲院，來觀看《金門女》。」<sup>41</sup>

伍錦霞的最後一次愛國主義電影嘗試，是在抗戰結束後後的1946年。她曾經希望與胡鵬導演合作，根據抗戰中的真人真事，拍攝影片《遊擊英雄》，但影片最終因南洋公司撤資而未能完成。<sup>42</sup> 此處筆者發現一個有趣的注腳，就是阿茲納也曾經導演一部戰爭片，《勇氣第一》（1943），但是影片還未完成時，阿茲納就染上肺炎，影片由另一位導演協助完成。痊癒後，阿茲納決定永遠離開荷里活。

其次，媒體中的伍錦霞，是一位十分投入的導演。很多文章中寫到她為人十分大方，歡迎各種拍片的機會，並且希望把

自己的工作做好，保證每部電影都能成功。《伶星》雜誌的編輯寫到，有天在片廠遇到伍錦霞，她說擔心《十萬情人》的成績，在影片獲得成功之前，不會考慮離港而返美。<sup>43</sup> 此片獲得成功後，伍錦霞繼續和南華影壇最耀眼的明星合作，鄭山笑、吳楚帆、白燕、林妹妹、張瑛、梁雪霏、盧敦等很多人都和她很熟絡。大家自然地接受了這位23歲的女導演，就像她本人自然就做了導演一樣，而他們的照片也都收藏在伍錦霞的相冊中。除了伍錦霞的熱情與友善，大家覺得她從小淫浸於荷里活電影文化，對於電影製作的理解和要求比普通香港導演要高。華人記者對於她的外貌通常描述得比較簡略，但是不少人都提到她身材短小，着裝、行動都像個男孩子，講起話來口若懸河，所到之處都帶着照相機。1938年9月廣州淪陷後，很多難民來到香港，各種疾病傳播，伍錦霞不幸染上了瘧疾。在不得已臥床之前，她同時進行着兩部電影的拍攝：《妒花風雨》和《一夜夫妻》。<sup>44</sup> 如果不是在舊金山的父母不停地急電促她返美，她至少還能多完成三部已經簽約的電影：啟明公司的《娘子軍》，以及天樂公司的兩部戲——喜劇片《荒唐月老》和神秘片《千里迷魂陣》。<sup>45</sup> 其中《娘子軍》早在1938年就開始在《伶星》雜誌上登出預告，寫明「伍錦霞導演」。<sup>46</sup>

第三，伍錦霞是一位很有頭腦的生意人。這裏再加一個注腳：1934年阿茲納曾經接受哥倫比亞公司的首腦哈里·科恩的任命，成為兩部電影的監製，但因為兩部影片均未能完成，



圖十 1946年大觀公司電影《藍湖碧玉》戲橋。(David Wells提供)  
 Fig 10 Lobby card of *Lady from the Blue Lagoon*, 1946. (courtesy of David Wells)

阿茲納的監製生涯也就僅有紙張上的記錄。<sup>47</sup> 受到父親影響的伍錦霞，從來就具有很精明的商業頭腦。三十年代在港停留期間，伍錦霞就幫助父親進口國片。戰後，伍錦霞赴港時，隨身攜帶了四萬尺膠片，希望拍片，同時想到如果自己不用，很輕易就能賣掉，因為這是香港戰後奇缺的物資。<sup>48</sup> 儘管在1946年末到1947年初的幾個月裏，她在港收到不少合作邀請，但經過自己的調查和計算，伍錦霞發現在美國拍片的成本比在戰後的香港低三分之二，故而拒絕所有邀請而返美拍片。<sup>49</sup> 臨行前，她還購買了30部南洋電影的在美洲的發行權。<sup>50</sup> 1947年初她一回到美國，就替大觀公司導演了《藍湖碧玉》一片。此後不久，她以自家的銀光公司為製片公司，連續拍攝了《虛

度春宵》和《怒火情焰》兩部「七彩影片」，分別於1948和1949年在美洲華埠、香港、南洋等地上映。一篇香港的報導提到伍錦霞十分讚賞荷里活B片（即小成本電影）製作的模式，認為十分適合香港的現狀。<sup>51</sup> 在結束導演生涯以後，伍錦霞不僅在紐約唐人街運營專映國片的戲院，從1949年到1970年去世期間她還開設了幾家餐廳。對伍錦霞來說，導演是她事業中的高潮與亮點，但是生意才是她一輩子的事業。

第四點，媒體有時會稱伍錦霞為雄心萬丈的「小妮子」，但更多地稱她為「女中丈夫」。<sup>52</sup> 作風比較穩重的雜誌編輯們，通常對於伍錦霞的性取向採取模糊表述，比如把韋劍芳稱為她的「密友」，把後來熱烈追求她的女演員林小妹稱為她的「好姐妹」。但是給1938年創辦的《星島日報》之「娛樂版」撰稿的年輕記者雷群不這麼看，他用一種完全不同的語氣，決心要撇清伍錦霞的同性之戀：

「我們以前說韋劍芳是伍的密友，這是不妥的，韋劍芳應該說是伍錦霞的戀人的！『戀人？』你覺得奇怪之至嗎？可是，我們不說謊的。世界上『同性戀』的可能性，韋伍給我們證實着。……目前及以往都是這樣，不論男男女女，老老少少，都呼稱她謂『霞哥』。這名字的出處是韋劍芳，韋劍芳回國後一直這樣呼喚她，許多人跟上都這樣呼喚她，因為，她自己也十分喜悅人家呼她為『哥』——一個專屬於男性的稱呼！直到現在我還沒有呼稱過伍錦霞一次，我知道得十分清楚她是

圖十一 1938年在片場  
拍戲的林小妹。

Fig 11 Lam Siu-mui in  
Nanyang Film Studio,  
1938.



女性，我不敢而且有些惶恐去呼稱她一個『哥』字，但，也不想用『女士』『小姐』去招她不歡喜，每次見面，只能點首了事。」<sup>53</sup>

在1930年代，粵劇男女仍舊不能同台的時候，全女班的劇團盛行。與粵劇圈關係密切的伍錦霞，似乎沒有因其男裝而引起甚麼爭議。但是記者雷群在「人類的詭奇」這個小標題下，區分了中國古代故事中的女扮男裝和伍錦霞的作為：

「中國古代有個女性花木蘭，也曾完全的男性過的，而且歷史上如此的男性還有孟麗君等多人，尚無怪異。而在伍錦霞這裏，還有一件事情則簡直是使我們拍案宇宙人類的詭異到尖端了，那便是工作，稱呼，行動，服飾之外，她所有着的感情，竟也是一個男性的感情。」<sup>54</sup>



雷群接着總結了伍錦霞和林小妹關係中的起落，評論這兩位戀人就像大多數年輕戀人一樣，既不懂得處理兩人之間的矛盾，也不懂得動輒就大打出手會影響她們的公眾形象。1938年1月26日，《伶星》雜誌也登出《韋劍芳離開伍錦霞》的消息。<sup>55</sup>《藝林》雜誌則在1939年4月1日和6月1日發表的兩篇文章中再次證實，韋劍芳和林小妹都和伍錦霞分手了。兩篇文章對伍錦霞表示同情，並希望她能夠借此機會專注事業、大展鴻圖。<sup>56</sup>當她要離開香港的時候，有編輯甚至猜測，她返美的原因之一，可能是因為她對於電影的品味比本地觀眾高得太多，曲高和寡。<sup>57</sup>當伍錦霞在戰後回到香港時，《藝林》雜誌已經停刊多時，但是另起爐灶的《伶星》雜誌繼續跟蹤報導她。1947年初，有兩篇文章分別報導她已經買好船票，以及她終於離開，顯示出依依惜別之情。<sup>58</sup>

1948年，伍錦霞曾經精心設計了她本人到香港影壇的回歸。她準備帶着新完成的《虛度春宵》一片以及片中女主角、粵劇名伶小非非一起回港，重演她當年帶着《心恨》和韋劍芳回港的輝煌。她們搭船到檀香山，準備稍事停留並從那裏返港時，有位僑商勸說她們在檀香山拍一部華語電影，他本人會出資。於是伍錦霞的最後一部獨立製作《怒火情焰》開拍，該片號稱是在檀香山拍攝的第一部華語電影。當地的華文報紙《中華公報》和英文報紙《檀報》都對影片的拍攝進行了跟蹤報導。<sup>59</sup>甚至在新加坡出版、由邵氏公司主辦的《電影圈》雜

圖十二 1950年《電影圈》雜誌對1949年出品的《怒火情焰》作了詳細報道。  
Fig 12 Film Circle's reportage on *Mad Fire Mad Love*, 1950.



誌，也都專文介紹了影片的男女主角，並且詳細報道了拍攝花絮。<sup>60</sup> 此後，伍錦霞為了影片發行事宜，經常在北美、古巴、秘魯等華埠旅行。她所到之處，當地的報紙必有報導，僑商夫人們會設宴招待，而當地的粵劇女伶也會紛紛奉上玉照。<sup>61</sup> 在伍錦霞最後兩本相冊中，照片上的日期大多是從1949年到1964年前後。可以看出早在1949年，她已經開設了成功的寶實餐廳。此後，她成為紐約華人影星和伶人到紐約必訪的人物。

## 女性電影和女性導演的先驅

阿茲納和伍錦霞的導演生涯之所以能夠持續十多年，部份得益於女性題材電影從三十到六十年代在荷里活和香港的流

行。雖然「女性電影」這個說法在荷里活傳統中與中國的「婦女題材電影」略有不同，但是正如筆者詳細論述過的，英文中對於「女性電影」的定義對華語電影語境中的「婦女題材電影」也基本適用。<sup>62</sup> 電影學者瑪麗·安·寶恩總結說，「女性電影」通常以女性角色為中心，情節圍繞着女性的問題——比如家庭、孩子、犧牲等——展開，但是最重要的是它的拍攝和製作主要針對女性觀眾。<sup>63</sup> 簡妮·貝辛格進一步指出：

「女性電影之所以成功，是因為它為社會解決了一個矛盾。它既保證女人不會踏出她的領地，又讓她在一個夢幻裏享受了女性可能擁有的能力和自由。它靠着給女性提供她們平時生活中沒有的體驗而把她們吸引到戲院裏，但同時保證她從戲院回家時，感覺到自己已經擁有的家庭生活就是最好的。……為了讓女人們相信婚姻和生兒育女才是正確道路，電影要顯示給她們看其他女人做了錯誤選擇的後果。」<sup>64</sup>

阿茲納對於女性電影的貢獻，早在三十年代就被業內雜誌的評論家留意到，但是到了1975年後才被女性主義學者們認真研究。裘蒂絲·梅因的專著中分析了四部阿茲納在當時的所謂「失敗」之作，論證了「失敗」的原因，主要是阿茲納對於女性角色的理解與荷里活慣常的表達相去甚遠。大部份研究都只把阿茲納作為女導演研究，但梅因還分析了阿茲納作為公開女同志的一面，並且把她的境遇與其他擅長女性電影的導演們





圖十三 1939年《女人世界》海報。

Fig 13 Advertisement for *It's a Women's World* (aka *36 Amazons*), 1939.

——大多數是男同志——作了比較。<sup>65</sup> 梅因提出一個有趣的觀點：做女導演「有點像做女同志，都是一個女人表現得好像一個男人在扮演一個女人的角色。」<sup>66</sup> 大多數學者都認識到，阿茲納的作品聚焦於女性的友誼和群體，並透過與女性編劇、服裝、編舞等工作人員的合作，「在銀幕上傳達了女性的生活、欲望和體驗，而且阿茲納從不會把女性形象變得簡單和孤立。」<sup>67</sup> 不誇張地說，阿茲納對於女性形象的塑造是對荷里活傳統的挑戰。

從伍錦霞的電影故事大綱中，我們可以瞭解到伍錦霞一直都十分同情女性角色，特別是那些因為不能擁有和維護「正常的」婚姻家庭的女性。因為伍錦霞大部份作品遺失，我們很難具體討論她如何在電影中呈現女性角色、建立女性敘事主體。<sup>68</sup> 但是她有兩部電影，值得在「女性電影」的語境下討論。

第一部是伍錦霞在香港拍攝的第五部電影《女人世界》（又名《三十六女天罡》，1939）。她是這部電影的聯合



圖十四 1947年伍錦霞監製和導演的《虛度春宵》劇照。

Fig 14 A still from *Back Street* (1947) produced and directed by Esther Eng.

編劇和導演。電影原來的標題《三十六女天罡》很有意思。三十六是中國文化中一個意為「全部」、「各個」的數字，而「女天罡」這個詞原來對應的英文詞Amazon指外形為女人頭胸與馬身綜合體的女戰神。這個詞翻譯成「天罡」已經偏離了原意，一般觀眾可能也覺得難以理解。電影發行時的正式名稱是《女人世界》，也同樣有着強烈的女性主義色彩。廣告中稱《女人世界》「36顆美艷女星主演」，「全部清一色女性，並無一個男人在內之破天荒最大膽、浪漫、風流、香艷巨片。」此片比米高梅的全女班電影《女人風光》（1939）早七個月上映。有意思的是，《女人風光》由同志導演佐治谷哥執導，共有130位女演員參加演出並有台詞。<sup>69</sup> 從創意上來說，《女人風光》符合荷里活女性電影的傳統，並完成其任務：先把女性放在夢的光芒之中，但結論是婚姻生活是女性能夠獲得的最大幸福。伍錦霞的《女人世界》直面社會對於女性生存的嚴峻挑戰。把36行的女性呈現在同一部電影中，本身就是伍錦霞創作能量的一種表現。她對於各行各業的女性沒有

褒此貶彼，也絕沒有敦促她們去做賢妻良母。阿茲納也沒有這樣做。

第二部電影是伍錦霞在美國導演的第三部作品《虛度春宵》，根據美國暢銷書作家芬妮·赫斯特1931年的暢銷小說《後街》改編。此片是伍錦霞自己的銀光公司的第一部獨立製作，對她來說意義重大。在伍錦霞的收藏中，沒有一張在香港拍攝的電影的劇照，只有工作照，在美國拍攝的影片也只有工作照。但是《虛度春宵》一片卻有超過三十張劇照，大部份經過手工上色，似乎是在做色彩試驗。小說《後街》於1932、1941、1961年三次被荷里活改編成同名電影，伍錦霞的版本於1948年完成，英文片名仍叫《後街》，中文片名開始叫《遲來春已晚》，後來改稱《虛度春宵》。筆者不能確定伍錦霞是否看過原小說，但1932和1941年改編的電影她應該看到過。<sup>70</sup> 1947年初，伍錦霞給《伶星》雜誌總編張作康的信中寫道：

「香港別後，轉瞬多月，甚念。抵美後，因私務忙，未暇寫信問候，請為原諒。自替大觀公司完成《藍湖碧玉》一片後，為着影片事曾到南美洲各國一遊。歸來後，本擬立即開拍蝴蝶麗主演的《碧血渡藍橋》，後她因私事臨時不能來舊金山，故而改拍《遲來春已晚》，小非非、廖奇偉、雪影紅主演。……影片已完成，在剪接中，不日可運抵香港放映了。」<sup>71</sup>



圖十五 1961年伍錦霞和小燕飛合作的《紐約碎屍案》是兩人告別銀幕的作品。（伍錦屏提供）

Fig 15 Esther Eng and Siu Yin Fei collaborated on *Murder in New York Chinatown* (1961), which proves to be the last film for both. (courtesy of Sally Ng)

我們由此知道，她在不到兩個月的時間內完成了影片，一定對《後街》的故事特別熟悉。

筆者相信伍錦霞改編《後街》至少有兩個原因。首先，《後街》的題材是伍錦霞特別偏愛的題材：沒有結局的愛情。故事講一個美麗能幹的女人，陰差陽錯未能和戀人結婚。後來戀人成婚，兩人相遇後再墮情網。女人從此作了已婚戀人的情人，一生未婚，直到他死去。其次，女主人公並不是真的住在戀人的「後街」，而是住在另一個城市（紐約）的豪華公寓裏。也就是說，這個悲劇故事是一個雙城記，讓伍錦霞可以把故事重設在舊金山和中國。因為她的目標觀眾是華人，「中國」在她攝製於美國影片中是常見的符號。比如她最後兩部電影中，《怒火情焰》的中國是文明之地，是希望與幸福的象徵；而在《紐約碎屍案》裏，「中國」則是新移民們離開的地方。

1948年夏天，伍錦霞在和《西雅圖郵報》的專欄作家弗蘭克·林奇的訪談中，透露出她選擇改編《後街》可能還有一個原因：

「華語電影和美國電影不同。我們立刻就瞭解到這一點。漂亮得可以做演員的伍小姐說，放映一套滑稽片時，中國觀眾坐在那裏，目不轉睛。戲院散場時，問他們觀感，他們會說，『不錯，不錯。』但你別信以為真。他們只是客氣而已。如果他們臉上帶着淚痕從戲院出來，別在意他們從你身邊匆匆擦過。他們急着去告訴朋友呢。悲劇！他們喜歡！」<sup>72</sup>

如此說來，伍錦霞改編《後街》，還因為它是一齣成功的悲劇。林奇的生動描繪，讓我們看到伍錦霞十分瞭解美國觀眾與中國觀眾的區別，這並不令人驚訝。《虛度春宵》原題是《遲來春已晚》，發行時更改的名稱，是為了更強調豔情的成份。然而，伍錦霞感到拍豔情片受到的限制：

「伍小姐還說拍情愛戲的時候她要特別小心。華人認為男女關係非常私密，因此不能有很長的吻戲；只能短促地吻一下，算是對年輕人有個交代。至於觀眾對此如何反應，伍小姐吹了一聲尖銳的口哨作答。華裔女演員也都很保守，她們堅持要穿得很密實。泳裝不要、浴衣不要，哦，我的天啊，泡泡浴，不要！寧死也不要！」<sup>73</sup>

伍錦霞的其他幾部電影也都經過了更名。《心恨》更名《鐵血芳魂》，從浪漫故事改為強調戰爭的影響。伍錦霞最後一部獨立製作《荒島留痕》原本強調在夏威夷拍攝，後來改名叫《怒火情焰》，以強調情節中的激情與衝突。影片名稱的更改，都是伍錦霞對於文化差異的某種調整。這讓我們想到，在去荷里活之前，她首先更改了自己的名字。以前在學校讀書的時候，美國老師不會讀「伍」字，「總是叫她「尼小姐」、「拿小姐」，有時乾脆就「NG小姐」這樣叫出來。錦霞說，我要去拍電影，NG怎麼行呢？拍電影吃了NG，是要重來的。於是她給自己的姓加了一個E，變成「英 ENG」。<sup>74</sup>

值得一提的是，林奇在小結《虛度春宵》的劇情時，完全沒有提到《後街》的小說作者赫斯特，讓人覺得有些諷刺意味。對於赫斯特的鄙夷，最著名的莫過於美國大作家費茲傑羅在小說《塵世樂園》中借人物之口說的，她是那種「沒有一部小說能夠流傳十年以上」的作家。<sup>75</sup> 荷里活三次改編《後街》前後跨越了30年的時間，已經打破了這種說法。伍錦霞對於《後街》的改編，也證明這部表現女性的情愛與犧牲的小說，不僅有它長久的魅力，還是一個可以跨越文化界限的題材。<sup>76</sup> 也就是說，《虛度春宵》能夠改編自《後街》，說明了女性題材在不同文化環境中有共通性。它不只在本國成為相對於主流電影的另類（或對抗）電影，在本國以外亦與不同國家的女性導演



電影共通，成為「世界電影」的一個支流：因為女導演在處理女性問題時，所帶入的女性視點和女性主體意識，相對於男性導演的作品，都呈現出共通的對抗性。

當我們回顧美國女導演的歷史時，一般認為阿茲納之前有「默片時代的露意絲·韋伯和愛麗絲·佳·布蘭琪，之後則是五十年代的埃達綠·韋伯。」<sup>77</sup>事實上，從1943年阿茲納退休，到綠·韋伯1949年底執起導筒之前，在美國拍攝劇情長片的「唯一女導演」，正是伍錦霞。如果不考慮伍錦霞，美國女導演的歷史就會出現六年的縫隙。同時，在中國，伍錦霞作為女導演的領軍人物，地位十分重要，她不僅引領了女導演漫長的脈絡，還是女性電影最早的女性貢獻者之一。

在華語電影工業中，伍錦霞是首位導演事業持續多年的女性，這也證明她的作品相當成功，因為她創造了一種獨特的與觀眾溝通的方式。在她1939年10月離開香港之前，另一位女電影人尹海靈在香港參與導演了多部影片。雖然尹海靈在香港的導演生涯僅僅持續了一年多，但是她後來又去了新加坡，成為拍攝馬來語電影的第一位女導演。<sup>78</sup>至少有一篇文章提到伍錦霞和尹海靈的存在對於女性成為導演是個很大的鼓勵。<sup>79</sup>在伍錦霞導演《怒火情焰》後，她有12年沒有參加電影製作，但是在1961年她與香港導演胡鵬聯合導演了《紐約碎屍案》。在她沒有作品的十多年中，任意之成為香港的「唯一女導演」，

參與執導的作品有19部之多。在伍錦霞、尹海靈、任意之之後，朱楓、唐書璇、高寶樹、俞鳳至、許鞍華、單慧珠、麥靈之、陳安琪、張艾嘉、張婉婷、羅卓瑤、彭綺華、陳麗英，以及數碼錄影時代來臨後湧現出的黃真真、林愛華、黎妙雪、麥婉欣、麥曦茵等年輕女導演們，共同形成了香港一個長長的、一直沒有間斷的女導演脈絡。大部份香港的女導演也都像伍錦霞一樣，在電影中關注普通女性的生活，關注社會變革如何影響兩性關係，以及香港的邊緣身份和移民潮中種種問題。因為不斷有女導演的作品產生，香港也在商業電影的主流之外，擁有着世界電影中不多見、並具有相當規模和影響的「女導演電影」支流。

魏時煜，香港城市大學創意媒體學院副教授。

本文所用圖片，除特別註明外，屬「伍錦霞相片集」及其最大持有人黃文約與香港電影資料館所有。魏時煜、羅卡及法蘭賓之個別項目獲以上最大持有人特別許可，可使用此相片集之圖片，其他人或機構未經許可，不得擅自採用。



## 註釋

1. 筆者在此感謝羅卡和法蘭賓分享研究材料，感謝伍錦屏和David Wells提供照片，並感謝李雯心幫助編輯本文的英文版。
2. 理查德·B·朱維爾在著作《The Golden Age of Cinema: Hollywood 1929-1945》（Blackwell, 2007）中，認為荷里活的黃金時代，是從有聲片全面拍攝的1929年到二戰結束的1945年。克萊爾·莊士頓和帕姆·曲嘉關於阿茲納的小書《The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema》（英國電影學院，1975），是最早論述她的生平與作品的著作。
3. 陶德·麥卡錫：〈Eng's Lost Pix a Chinese Puzzle〉，《綜藝》1995年8月21-27日期刊，頁10。
4. 羅卡和法蘭賓：〈The Esther Eng Story〉，《Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View》（2004），Scarecrow Press，頁91-105。後由北京大學出版社於2012年出版中譯本《香港電影跨文化觀》（增訂版）。
5. 羅卡：〈In Search of Esther Eng: Border-crossing Pioneer in Chinese-language Filmmaking〉，見王玲珍編，《Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Contexts》，哥倫比亞大學出版社，2011，頁313。
6. 《金門銀光夢》由羅卡、魏時煜製片，魏時煜導演，香港藝術發展局贊助，藍后文化傳播有限公司出品，2013年第37屆香港國際電影節首映。
7. 上海市電影局編的《上海電影歷史資料》第二卷（1994）中曾經提到中國的第一位女導演是謝采真，唯一的作品是替南星影片公司拍的《孤雛悲聲》（1925），但是刊登在1925年9月至12月的《申報》「自由談」欄目的幾篇小文，都提到此片的導演是謝雲卿，謝采真只是主演。所以伍錦霞是否中國第一位女導演，還有待進一步研究。
8. 在二戰中，德國最著名的女導演蘭妮·萊芬斯坦（1902-2003）達到事業最高峰，戰後卻被斥為希特拉的宣傳工具，很多人一直沒有原諒她，但她的電影仍舊是經典。
9. 卡琳·凱和傑納德·皮爾：〈Interview with Dorothy Arzner〉，《The Work of Dorothy Arzner》，英國電影協會，2007。頁19。
10. 同上。
11. 同註9，頁20。
12. 同註9，頁22-23。

13. 朱迪絲·梅因，《Directed by Dorothy Arzner》，印第安納大學出版社，1994，頁57-59。
14. 伍錦霞的收藏中有兩幅飛行員的大相片可以證明這一點，相片背後有兩位飛行員寫給她和她家人的祝福。
15. 〈伍錦霞上銀幕及其他〉，《藝林》，第55期，香港，香港大同貿易公司，1939年6月1日。
16. 〈電影公司新名稱〉，《華人文摘》，第一卷：第六期，1935年12月20日。
17. 貝蒂·柯乃麗絲：〈Esther Eng, Movie Maker, Visits Here〉，《西雅圖時報》1946年6月9日。
18. 〈全華人班組拍攝的電影完成〉，《洛杉磯時報》，1935年12月15日。
19. 〈《心恨》將在本周放映〉，《華人文摘》，第二卷：第七期，1936年2月14日。
20. 殘香：〈迎芳會速寫〉，《玫瑰》1936年第11期。
21. 同註18。
22. 《鐵血芳魂》廣告，《南強日報》1936年6月28日，其中「監製」只有伍錦霞一人，省略了Bruce Wong。五項紀錄的最後一條未經驗證，筆者看到的英文資料，這部影片只有在華人戲院中放映，因而所謂「荷里活大戲院」，只是一個模糊的概念。
23. 〈決定中止美洲之行，伍錦霞準備迎春〉，《伶星》，第208期，1937年8月29日。
24. 〈中國第一個女導演〉，《藝林》，第11期，同註15，1937年7月11日。
25. 描述阿茲納外形的文章很多，比如〈Distaff Side Director〉，《紐約時報》1936年9月27日，頁X, 4；再比如〈Meeting Miss Dorothy Arzner, Screen's Only Woman Director〉，《Herald Tribune》1930年11月16日。描述伍錦霞的文章則有《蓮花看你》，《華人文摘》，第二卷：第十九期，1936年5月8日，頁3。
26. 同註17。
27. 〈Hilltop Tenant〉，《Screen and Radio Weekly》，1936年，見加州大學洛杉磯分校阿茲納檔案，日期不祥。
28. 安·西爾維絲特：〈Make Way for the Ladies〉，《電影戲劇雜誌》1927年12月號。
29. 同註9，頁23。
30. 舍麗丹·茱里：《Katherine Hepburn》，Pavilion出版社，1989，頁39。

31. 嘉芙蓮協賓：《Me: Stories of My Life》，Alfred A. Knopf 出版社，1991，頁144-145。
32. 同註13，頁71-74。
33. 這份剪報是貼於伍錦屏提供的相簿上，剪報有手寫字說明日期為1931年2月5日，但經研究者法蘭賓及David Wells的進一步考證，得知剪報的正確刊登日期為1930年12月5日的*San Francisco Chronicle*。
34. 〈女性電影導演〉，《紐約太陽報》1930年9月23日。
35. 〈南華女導演伍錦霞生財有道〉，《果然日報》1946年10月27日。
36. 〈伍錦霞決定九月回美去〉，《藝林》，第57期，同註15，1939年7月1日。
37. 阿丁：〈女導演何日重來？伍錦霞將來港辦報業〉，《伶星》，光復版第二期，1946年2月16日，頁10。
38. 〈金門女〉，《綜藝》1941年5月28日。
39. 見註3。麥卡錫認為這部影片和其他反映新移民的影片一樣，是老傳統和新環境的母題，但是在當時，統一戰線、聯合抗日才是對華人觀眾最重要的主題。
40. 這兩個廣告詞來自影片在舊金山影院的宣傳海報。
41. 〈電影人伍錦霞到訪〉，《西雅圖時報》1946年6月9日。
42. 〈中國唯一的女導演伍錦霞急於返國〉，《星島晚報》1947年1月12日。
43. 〈伍錦霞砲聲碎歸夢〉，《伶星》，第211期，1937年8月7日。
44. 〈伍錦霞病中見鬼〉，《藝林》，第48期，同註15，1939年2月15日。
45. 〈打破伍錦霞回美之謎〉，《藝林》，第44期，同註15，1938年12月15日。
46. 《娘子軍》廣告最早見《伶星畫報》雜誌，1938年7月下弦號。
47. 同註13，頁68。
48. 同註37。
49. 同註42。
50. 〈伍錦霞乘海蛇破萬里浪〉，《伶星》，第138期，1947年1月15日。
51. 同註4，頁97。
52. 〈伍錦霞雄心萬丈，計劃壟斷美洲整個影片市場〉，《成報》1946年12月22日。

53. 雷群：〈女導演伍錦霞〉，《星島日報》1938年12月15日娛樂版。
54. 同註53。
55. 〈韋劍芳離開伍錦霞〉，《伶星》，第219期，1938年1月26日。
56. 〈伍錦霞兩件事〉，《藝林》，第51期，同註15，1939年4月1日；〈伍錦霞決定九月回美去〉，《藝林》，第55期，同註15，1939年6月1日。
57. 〈伍錦霞決定九月回美去〉，《藝林》，第55期，同註15，1939年6月1日。
58. 同註50。
59. 〈伍錦霞借華夏社拍夜景〉，《中華公報》1948年10月4日；〈夏威夷首部華語片近期會在檀首映〉，《檀報》，1948年11月11日。
60. 白寒：〈沙龍女郎與七彩皇帝〉，《電影圈》總第147期，1949年7月15日出版，頁17；銀杏：〈怒火情焰雜寫〉，《電影圈》總第153期，1950年1月15日出版，頁15。
61. 〈娛樂消息〉，《開明公報》，古巴夏灣拿，1947年10月6日。
62. 魏時煜：〈百年銀幕女性和女性電影傳統的嬗變〉，楊遠嬰編，《中國電影專業史研究：電影文化卷》，中國電影出版社，2005，頁439-503。
63. 瑪麗·安·賓恩：《The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s》，印第安納大學出版社，1987，頁3。
64. 簡妮·貝辛格：《A Women's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960》，衛斯理大學出版社，1993，頁6。
65. 梅因重點討論的男同志導演是佐治谷哥，因為他與阿茲納的事業有幾次交集。
66. 同註13，頁62-63。
67. 同註13，頁93。
68. 伍錦霞的導演作品，我們確知仍舊留存於世的只有兩部，《金門女》和《紐約碎屍案》，而這兩部電影分別是她和關文清、胡鵬聯合導演的。因為兩位男導演在影片中起到相當大的作用（關文清是《金門女》的聯合導演、編劇和剪輯，胡鵬則是《紐約碎屍案》的第一導演），我們很難判斷伍錦霞作為導演的女性主體表達發揮到甚麼程度。

69. 《女人風光》從情節上來說，是《色慾都市》的1939年版本。
70. 如果伍錦霞沒有在美國看過1932年版的《後街》，1936年她在香港期間，此片曾在香港上映。而1941年版的《後街》在美國上映時，伍錦霞已經在美國了。
71. 〈《遲來春已晚》全部完成，伍錦霞漫遊南美〉，《伶星》，第334期，1948年2月19日。
72. 弗蘭克·林奇：〈悲劇！他們喜歡〉，《西雅圖郵報》1947年8月「西雅圖場景」欄目。
73. 同上註。
74. 伍錦屏在訪談中講過這個故事，另見〈出水芙蓉女主角，南華影壇女導演：愛絲德！藝名之趣味〉，見《成報》1947年1月29日。
75. 史葛·費茲傑羅：《塵世樂園》，《F. Scott Fitzgerald》，Heinemann Octopus 出版社，1977，頁457。
76. 和伍錦霞的版本有異曲同工之處的，是《後街》1961年的版本，其中女主人公的生活和工作地點是意大利的羅馬，而她的戀人仍舊生活在小說中寫到的紐約。紐約這個地點在1932和1941年的版本中也一樣作為美國現代化城市的標誌而出現。伍錦霞的版本中，紐約被搬到舊金山。如果伍錦霞是在1949年以後拍攝這部電影，她可能也會選擇紐約，因為她本人在1949年之後移居紐約了。
77. 簡·根斯：〈桃樂西·阿茲納的長褲〉，《Jump Cut》1992年7月，總第37期，頁88。
78. 法蘭賓：〈尹海靈：謎樣的白衣女郎〉，《香港電影資料館通訊》第65期，2013年8月，頁10-15。
79. 〈伍錦霞、尹海靈之後，鄭孟霞做女導演〉，《藝林》，第62期，同註15，1939年11月15日。

# “She Wears Slacks”: Pioneer Women Directors Esther Eng and Dorothy Arzner <sup>1</sup>

— S. Louisa Wei

In the 1970s, as feminist scholars began to reevaluate how women were seen and represented in Hollywood films, the discovery of Dorothy Arzner (1897-1979), the only woman director of Hollywood’s “golden age of cinema,” had a double-fold significance.<sup>2</sup> On one hand, her 16 years as the only woman director in America was crucial in the rewriting of Hollywood history. Arzner had been forgotten for years after her retirement in 1943, before two scholars interviewed her in 1974. In January 1975, Director’s Guild of America sponsored a tribute to Dorothy Arzner, paying homage to its very first “femme member.” On the other, her 16 feature films—all of which might be put under the category of woman’s film—exemplified women’s cinema as counter cinema: they deconstruct mainstream representations of women and “speak” to the female audience in a way that is different from Hollywood. Since most of Arzner’s films still exist, it is possible for scholars to read her works closely. Alongside Arzner, Esther Eng (1914-70), the Chinese woman

director active between 1937 and 1949, has the same double-fold significance, although the “rediscovery process” for Esther Eng has been ridden with much more difficulties due to the loss of her films and documents.

Once referred to by the press as China’s first and only woman director, Esther Eng was forgotten for the 25 years following her death. In 1995, *Variety*’s then chief film critic Todd McCarthy rediscovered Eng, provocatively claiming her to be “an Asian woman filmmaker who had utterly eluded the radar of the most diligent feminist historians and sinophiles.”<sup>3</sup> Intrigued by this statement, film scholars Frank Bren and Law Kar collaborated on a substantial research project on Eng that resulted in the published book chapter “The Esther Eng Story”, which offers the first overview of her life and works.<sup>4</sup> As Law Kar summarizes later in a 2012 article, “If Eng had worked in the film industry today, she could have easily been

seen as a champion of transnational filmmaking, feminist filmmaking, or antiwar filmmaking.”<sup>5</sup> As an extension of previous research, Law Kar and I produced a documentary on Eng that attempts to contextualize her life and works, within both Chinese American history and international film history, paying special attention to the period from the 1930s to 1940s.<sup>6</sup>

This essay aims to be a cross-cultural study that compares Esther Eng and Dorothy Arzner, both of whom received a lot of media attention as well as the title “only woman director” in their respective industries and contexts.<sup>7</sup> I hope to demonstrate why Eng deserves to be put on the map of pioneer women directors, despite the fact that both Chinese and American film histories fail to include her. Even more interestingly, when we read their stories side by side, it seems Arzner and Eng have the ability to validate each other’s unique position in the writing of cross-cultural history. The following discussion will compare the two woman pioneers in order to answer three questions: 1) how did they obtain and sustain their position as director; 2) how did local media perceive their works and their personae; and 3) what are their significances as directors of woman’s films and pioneers of women’s cinema?

### War Lent Them a Chance to Direct

Both Esther Eng and Dorothy Arzner were born in San Francisco



to rather wealthy families, received good secondary education, and watched numerous plays/operas and films in their youths. In addition to their passion, talent and determination, the war lent them the chance to work in the film industry. Whereas the career option had not previously been available to most and especially women, special historical circumstances of labor shortage and nationalist calls helped them to enter the industry. Arzner entered the Famous Players-Lasky's studio (the precursor of Paramount) shortly after the end of WWI and retired two years before WWII ended. Eng began filming in the fourth year of the Second Sino-Japanese war and wrapped up her last film towards the end of China's post-WWII Civil War. In Arzner and Eng's time, many women—most famously American writer Pearl Buck and China's first lady Soong May-ling—came to international prominence. In each of these cases, war indeed opened up unusual opportunities for women to shine, but those opportunities would also be taken away as soon as the war came to an end.<sup>8</sup>

Arzner's father owned a famous restaurant near a theatre in Hollywood, where she met famous actors of both stage and screen quite often. Although she once studied to be a medical doctor, she dropped out of university after spending some time “meeting the sick” at a doctor's office during a summer internship. As she put it humorously, she wanted to be like Jesus—“‘Heal the sick and raise the dead,’ instantly, without surgery, pills, et cetera.”<sup>9</sup> She describes how she got her first studio job:

"This was after World War I and everything was starting to bounce—even the infant picture studios. An appointment was made for me to meet William DeMille. He was told I was an intelligent girl. There had been a serious flu epidemic, so workers were needed. It was possible for even inexperienced people to have an opportunity if they showed signs of ability or knowledge." <sup>10</sup>

William DeMille was in charge of all production in the studio at the time. He immediately suggested Arzner visit different parts of the studio. While observing big time director Cecil DeMille at work, she concluded that, "If one was going to be in this movie business, one should be a director because he was the one who told everyone else what to do. In fact, he was the 'whole work.'"<sup>11</sup> The labor shortage caused by the "flu epidemic" also helped two young Chinese Americans get their first studio jobs: James Wong Howe, who was hired as a clapper boy, quickly became Cecil DeMille's cameraman; Anna May Wong, who after only a couple of bit roles, took the lead role in *The Toll of the Sea* in 1922 and rose to international fame.

It is ironic that during the first three decades of film history, women were allowed to direct. Early American cinema had over a dozen of women directors in the silent period including prominent figures like Alice Guy Blaché and Lois Weber, each with several

hundred titles under their name. By 1929 when all studios began making talkies and Hollywood stepped into its “golden age,” Dorothy Arzner was the only woman director and remained so till the end of her film career. Her success story was widely circulated in news and magazines: during the first seven years of her studio work, she helped to make over 50 films and climbed up the studio ladder from stenographer and editor to assistant director. In 1926, she was about to leave Paramount, the studio in which she was employed, to write and direct in the then much smaller Columbia Pictures. Paramount’s top management gave her a counter offer to direct “A” pictures for them. “It was announced in the papers the following day or so: ‘Lasky Names Woman Director.’”<sup>12</sup> Soon after, Arzner made her directing debut with the silent movie *Fashions for Women* (1927) and, two years later, her first talkie *Wild Parties* (1929). All her early pictures received good responses from the press, which allowed her to continuously produce films for Paramount until 1932. Her last picture *Working Girls* (1931), was a box office failure, but her comedy *Go Merrily to Hell* in 1932 was one of the best films of the year.<sup>13</sup> From 1932 on, for a number of reasons, Arzner went independent—as a director-for-hire. Her first directorial work after Paramount was for RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum), directing Katherine Hepburn in *Christopher Strong* (1933). Five films followed before Arzner decided to leave Hollywood forever in 1943.

No evidence has been found on whether Esther Eng watched

any of Arzner's films growing up. If Eng had been aware of Arzner's existence, it seems likely she might have been inspired by *Christopher Strong*, which features a story where the heroine is an aviatrix and her love is unfulfilled. Eng loved aviation,<sup>14</sup> and her first two films as co-producer and then director center respectively on an aviator and an aviatrix. A rare photo of Eng taken in the spring of 1936 in front of the gate of RKO also suggests that the studio might have held some special significance or meaning for her. In my interviews with her younger sister Sally Ng, I learn that Eng worked at the box office of The Mandarin, a San Francisco's Chinese cinema venue close to her home, so that she could watch movies. Her film education seemed to consist mostly of the hundreds of pictures that she had watched there. Although Eng also showed an interest in acting and allegedly auditioned for MGM's *The Good Earth* for supporting roles, she stopped waiting for the casting results as soon as another film work opportunity came along. Later, she also turned down invitations for her to appear on screen in Hong Kong. As an *Artland* article suggests, she did not seem to like having her acting judged by other directors. The article indicates that she did agree at one point to act as Hong Niang in *Romance of the West Chamber* for the Nanyue Film Company, but no other source supports this story.<sup>15</sup>

In 1933, when filmmaker Kwan Man-ching (aka Moon Kwan) brought Lai Man-wai's documentary *Army Route 19 – Fighting the*

*Japanese Enemy* (1932) to California and screened it for Chinese communities there, the film generated a great deal of patriotic feeling. Eng's father, the famous merchant Ng Yu-jat, and his friend decided to invest in a film that would later become Eng's filmmaking debut: *Heartaches*. They set up the Kwong Ngai Talking Pictures, whose English name was changed to Cathay Pictures Ltd. shortly after.<sup>16</sup> The company's registration address was the address of Eng's family home: 1010 Washington Street, San Francisco. Esther Eng and a young man named Bruce Wong were entrusted to act as co-producers. Betty Cornelius wrote about Eng's first filmmaking experience in an article for *Seattle Times*:

"Since 1936, when she met a famous Chinese actress in California and decided to produce a picture, Esther has surprised older and experienced men in her field. Still in her teens, and with no background of such a venture, Esther went to Hollywood, rented a studio in Sunset Boulevard and made her first picture for Chinese markets here and in China." <sup>17</sup>

Cornelius, later known as Betty Bowen, would become renowned as a champion for women artists, so, in retrospect, her interest in Eng was natural. Hers is the only reportage on Eng that is confirmed to be by a woman and it puts Eng in a very positive light.

While *Heartaches* was in production, a *Los Angeles Times* press release dated December 15, 1935, noted the “speeded” making of this “first oriental production with sound finished in Hollywood.” The article reads:

"Frank Tang, 28-year-old director, and Henry Tung, both backed by San Francisco capital, collaborated on the scenario for the picture which took eight days to produce. It consisted of nine reels, two in color, with modern dress is worn throughout except for the colored portion filmed expressly to bring out the beauty of the native costumes." <sup>18</sup>

This article specifies that the studio Eng rented was “Reliable Studio” but does not mention her name anywhere, a slip which might have to do with the fact that press releases then usually skipped names of producers. Eng’s participation and presence on set is verified by at least two sets of sources. First, two photos in her possession show her posing with Hollywood technicians and Chinese crew members. Eng also kept two prints showing her close friend and the film’s star Wai Kim-fong working with director Frank Tang and other actors in addition to over a dozen stills from the picture itself. Second, *Chinese Digest*, an English periodical published in San Francisco for the Chinese community, mentions Eng in an announcement of the opening of *Heartaches* at the Mandarin

Theater on February 15th and 16th of 1936:

"*Heartaches* is financed by Quon Yi Lum, and produced by Esther Eng and Bruce Wong, with Paul Ivano, formerly Gloria Swanson's best cameraman, doing the camera work. Story and direction are by Frank Tong and Henry Tung. Capacity audience is expected to witness this stirring film. All of the players in the cast, with the exception of the star, are American-Chinese. Miss Eng with Miss Fong, will journey shortly to China to seek prospective film stars for their coming productions. They will stay in China for two months. The present picture will also be shown in Singapore in the near future." <sup>19</sup>

It was not known why only "Miss Eng with Miss Fong" would journey to China with the picture, but for Eng, the supposed "two months" trip ended up extending to a stay of over three years and four months.

Eng and Wai arrived in Hong Kong on June 4, 1936. A welcoming party was held in their honor and attended by over 50 film companies and local media. Both were invited to give a speech, and Eng introduced the making of *Heartaches* in hers.

"She addressed herself as 'little sister' (in business) and said



that, while living in the US, she had noted the reduction of Chinese language films available for import there. She wanted to promote the national film in a foreign country. She was aware that having always lived in America, she might be ignorant of Chinese viewers' tastes. She hoped to make films more suitable for them."<sup>20</sup>

*Rose* magazine's Can Xiang was apparently confused about Wai's identity, praising her Chinese language skills without knowing that the *Los Angeles Times* likewise confused her for "an importation from studios in China."<sup>21</sup> In fact, the only screen appearance Wai had was in the very first Cantonese opera documentary titled *Third Mother Teaches Her Son*, which was directed by Kwan Man-ching in 1934. The same reporter acknowledged Eng's tact in fielding reporters' questions. If it is impressive how clearly 22-year old Esther Eng expressed her ambitions as soon as she arrived in Hong Kong, it is perhaps even more admirable how soon after she carried out her plans in action.

With the release of *Heartaches* in Hong Kong, Eng's name was printed in both Chinese and English news materials and advertisements, fully credited as the producer of a Hollywood film. The aura of Hollywood was elaborated in an advertisement that boasted the picture setting "five records in Chinese language cinema: 1) the first in Technicolor; 2) the first shot in Hollywood; 3) the first with air battle scenes; 4) the first premiered to Europe and America;

and 5) the first to be released in Hollywood theatres.”<sup>22</sup> This publicity helped to obtain *Heartaches* a premiere at Hong Kong’s most expensive venue at the time—Queen’s Theatre, which had until that time shown Western pictures only. What really contributed to the film’s success, however, was its patriotic content and its timely release as ongoing conflict and tension between China and Japan would lead to the breakout of war in 1937.

Eng lost no time in registering a Hong Kong branch for her father’s Kwong Ngai Talking Pictures and producing another patriotic film, *National Heroine*. The film recast *Heartaches* sensation Wai Kim-fong in the role of leading actress and, in some ways, one can see the latter role as an extension of the first. In *Heartaches*, Fong plays the rising young opera star Fan, who sacrifices her personal love for a young aviator so he can concentrate on his training. He goes back to China and becomes a war hero defending his home country. When he returned to San Francisco with his newly wedded Chinese wife, Fan falls ill. He finally learns the truth of his former love interest and she dies content in his arms. In *National Heroine*, the heroine fights alongside male soldiers for the country, signifying a big leap-forward for the heroine, who is lifted out of her role as a weepy victim and cast, instead, in a way that befits the context of national defense building. It is because of this film that Eng might be considered among the pioneers of the so-called “National Defense

Cinema" before it became mainstream in 1938 and 1939.

The most amazing aspect of the production of *National Heroine* was how Eng took up the role of director having only co-produced one picture prior. The choice seems to have been rather bold and risky. Within the Hollywood system, even a talented director like Dorothy Arzner had to go through seven years of studio apprenticeship and in 1936, Japan's first woman director Tazuko Sakane directed her first and only feature film after working six years under Shochiku's big time director Kenji Mizoguchi as script girl, editor and assistant director. Eng had none of studio apprenticeship that was essential in grounding the directing careers of Arzner and Sakane, but she managed to make her directorial debut a success. The war time atmosphere certainly contributed to this as it drew the immediate recognition of such organizations as the Cantonese Women's Association for patriotic achievements and the promotion of positive images of women. She was delighted to receive the certificate which, as her sister Sally Ng remembers, hung in their San Francisco home for many years. There is at least one source that documents her talent as a director. An article in Hong Kong's *Ling Sing* magazine that reports on both film and opera circles, writes that Joseph Sunn Jue, the director of Grandview Film Company, saw *National Heroine* and recognized Eng as a rare talent. Sunn was building his studio in Hong Kong and recruiting talent at the time.

Although Eng had planned to go back to America to gather more funding for her next project, she decided in August 1937 to stay and to direct a picture for Grandview instead.<sup>23</sup> After her initial success with *National Heroine*, she received a string of invitations to direct.<sup>24</sup> Her next four films were social satires and comedies produced by four different companies: *100,000 Lovers* (1938) for Grandview, *Tragic Love* (1938) for Tianle, *A Night of Romance*, *A Lifetime of Regret* (1938) for Great Star, and *It's a Women's World* for Wode. She would make a total of five pictures in Hong Kong and another five in the US throughout her career.

### “The Only Woman Director” and Media Reportage

As the “only woman director” of their respective contexts, both Arzner and Eng received a lot of media attention. Even though I have found no Chinese or English media source that compares them, the two had a striking resemblance, even physically. Both had short hair brushed back from the forehead. The style was often described as “boyish” or “mannish.” Both Arzner and Eng wore tailored suits and slacks “in combinations of black and white or gray.” They also favored “sports clothes and flat heels.”<sup>25</sup> Both were also relatively small in stature. Arzner was 5’4” and Eng was only 5’, facts that may have contributed to impressions of their youthfulness. We might compare the following two descriptions of Eng and Arzner, respectively.

"Her shiny, blue-black hair is cropped in a mannish bob, and

she wears power-blue slacks and 'T' shirt under a tailored, off-white jacket. Her square, rather masculine watch, with diamonds for numbers, and wide-mesh band matches a platinum ring set with a large, pear-shaped diamond. The little-finger ring is of her own design. With her delicately chiseled face and sensitive mouth, she looks to be about 17 years old, a fact she has had to fight against since her first picture. When it came time for her to sign a contract for the release of the picture which was taken to Hong Kong by the star and confiscated by the Japanese military, she was asked if she were of age." <sup>26</sup>

"Here is a very satisfying face, brilliantly alive; her skin is clear and healthy, without aid of cosmetics; her eyes are a deep, violet-blue, shadowed with long lashes, and I should hate to be the one to double-cross or try to fool those eyes. ... she wears a severely tailored tweed suit, with mannish shirt and tie, when working. She orders her shirts by the dozen from a New York firm and says she feels this is the only sort of costume suited to her job." <sup>27</sup>

There were numerous articles on Arzner during her Paramount years. The studio's publicity shots of her often emphasize the butch-femme contrast between Arzner and her leading actresses. Even though reports did not explicitly mention her sexual orientation, connotations were embedded with such shots that not only

highlighted the masculine-feminine contrast in attire between her and her actresses, but also captured Arzner striking authoritative or instructional poses and emphasized the gazes exchanged between director and actresses. The most provocative of all such photos is one showing actress Clara Bow sitting on Arzner's lap, the flirtatiousness between them made obvious. Arzner's working relationship with actresses is an area that reporters and critics often explored. Reviewers of her early films noted the potential of rising stars such as Esther Ralston and Clara Bow, but reporters who had seen and interviewed Arzner in person often paid more attention to her than her stars. Paramount was willing to supply certain details to help reporters portray their and Hollywood's only woman director positively. In one report, for instance, Ann Sylvester writes: "It is an open secret on the Paramount lot that Miss Arzner's company is the best disciplined in the studio—and that it is self-disciplined."<sup>28</sup>

Arzner was most productive during her years in Paramount as a director, completing ten pictures between 1926 and 1932. After she left Paramount and became a director-for-hire, she only directed six pictures in the ten year period between 1933 and 1943: two pictures for RKO, two for Columbia, one for MGM and one for United Artist. Without the studio umbrella, work became much tougher for Arzner. For three of these six pictures, she was brought in to replace another director, all male, who could not complete the project. She

had less control over the projects and the conditions of production and this showed. Not belonging to any studio did not mean more creative freedom in her time.

Moreover, while it might be hoped that a representative of women's filmmaking might be a champion of women, Arzner was known to have said, "No one gave me trouble because I was a woman. Men were more helpful than women."<sup>29</sup> Both Katherine Hepburn and Joan Crawford had looked forward to working with Arzner on projects, but neither collaboration turned into a success. Writings on Arzner's relationship with Hepburn and Crawford are contradictory. Hepburn biographer Sheridan Morley notes that while directing *Christopher Strong*, "Arzner disliked the way that Hepburn would always be speaking up for the 'little people' on the set against her often autocratic and very demanding way of working."<sup>30</sup> Hepburn herself, however, writes in her memoir, "Dorothy was very well known and had directed a number of hit pictures. She wore pants. So did I. We had a good time working together."<sup>31</sup> Arzner's collaboration with Crawford was also a critical and box-office failure, largely due to MGM's directing head Louis B. Mayer's interference of how the woman should be presented in *The Bride Wore Red* (1968). The two women maintained a friendship in the end: at Crawford's request, Arzner directed her in a Pepsi commercial in the 1950s.<sup>32</sup> These could be personality clashes that

were not uncommon between directors and actors, but the sources on Arzner in these aspects reveal how difficult it can be to be the “only woman director” in an industry: gender can contribute as much to successes as they can to failures.

The earliest news image of Eng was published in San Francisco’s local news on December 5th, 1930, showing Eng as a drum majorette in a picture with the caption reading: “Esther Ng leading a group of clever drummer girls in the Pagoda Festival parade through Chinatown last night, in which thousands of Chinese children took part.”<sup>33</sup> Several of her high school pictures reveal her as a central and leading figure among her schoolmates. When she arrived in Hong Kong, she was only 22 year old, and magazine editors sometimes wrote about her in a tone of fondness. *Ling Sing* and *Artland*, two magazines reporting on both film and Cantonese opera circles, followed Eng’s progress on pictures and relationship with actresses closely between 1937 and 1939. *Ling Sing* resumed report on Eng before her returning to Hong Kong in 1947 and kept following her until at least 1949. Comparing to Arzner, Eng seemed to enjoy a lot of freedom in her creative process and to have a very trusting relationship with all actresses. However, since the historical and cultural context of Hong Kong’s film industry was very different from Hollywood’s, magazine editors and reporters in Hong Kong expressed their curiosity and concern in a different manner. As



mentioned before, Eng's career took off with work for her family company Kwong Ngai, for which she co-produced *Heartaches* and directed *National Heroine*.<sup>34</sup> Hers was not the kind of "Horatio Alger story" so famously attributed to Arzner once.<sup>35</sup> Eng had neither such a social mobility story nor a studio to promote her in print, so stories on her often portray her as a genius or prodigy.<sup>36</sup>

Eng's public persona as portrayed by the Hong Kong media contains four aspects. First, she was a patriot. This persona was firmly established by her first two films, *Heartaches* and *National Heroine*, both of which involve plots featuring fighting off "the enemy" (an implicit term for "the Japanese invaders"). Following the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, filmmakers from Shanghai poured into Hong Kong and soon began to make "national defense films." Eng switched to social satires, but her name was still listed in "national defense" committee and organization rosters. Since most American citizens left China after Japan's attack of Shanghai in August 1937, Eng's decision to stay was interpreted as a display of her "love of the homeland."<sup>37</sup> Eng stayed in Hong Kong as late as October 1939. A year later, when she resumed filmmaking in America, she directed *Golden Gate Girl* for Grandview's San Francisco studio.<sup>38</sup> The conflict and final reconciliation between the stern grandfather and his progressive granddaughter in the story promotes the need for a more united front when facing invaders than

“the Old Way versus New Home” central to many later Chinese American films.<sup>39</sup> This film, advertised as having a “correct ideology” and “touching plot”, is considered another patriotic statement of Eng’s.<sup>40</sup> A report by Cornelius also indicates that the film also caused a sensation during its theater run:

"Thousands queue daily to wait for hours in Hong Kong and other Chinese cities fortunate enough to possess moving-picture houses to see the one new Chinese picture filmed since the war. Prewar films shown repeatedly, were learned by heart, and the Chinese, eager for fresh entertainment, have been crowding theatres to see *Golden Gate Girl*." <sup>41</sup>

Eng’s last attempt to make a patriotic film was *Guerrilla Heroes* based on real accounts of the Second Sino-Japanese war. It was planned in 1946 but never materialized.<sup>42</sup> An interesting parallel in Arzner’s life might be of interest to note. Arzner directed only one film, *First Comes Courage* (1943), with scenes of war and it was the only film of hers that was eventually completed by another director as Arzner fell terribly sick during production. When she recovered, she decided to leave Hollywood forever.

The second aspect of Eng’s media portrayal is that she was a devoted filmmaker. Her reportage was consistent about her openness

to opportunities to direct as well as her commitment to doing a good job. The editor of *Ling Sing* reported that he once “ran into her in the studio and was told that she was concerned with the result of *100,000 Lovers* and would not think of returning home until that this film proved another success.”<sup>43</sup> It did. Eng worked well with the top stars of Southern Chinese cinema, including Kwong Shan-siu, Ng Cho-fan, Pak Yin, Lam Mui-mui, Cheung Ying, Leung Suet-fei, Lo Duen and many others, whose photographs can all be found in her personal albums. In addition to Eng’s openness and amicability, everyone accepted this 23-year-old woman as their director because they believed that her standards for film were higher than those of local directors, as she once worked in Hollywood. Chinese reporters’ description of her look is very sketchy, yet, many confirmed that she was quite small, moved around like a boy, dressed in man’s clothes, was very articulate, and carried a camera most of the time. As refugees poured into Hong Kong throughout 1938 and especially after the bombing of Guangzhou in September 1938, various diseases spread and Eng contracted malaria. She still appeared on the movie set, working on two films—*Tragic Love* and *A Night of Romance*, *A Lifetime of Regret*—simultaneously until she was bedridden.<sup>44</sup> If it were not the telegraphs from her worried parents, Eng would have three more projects under her belt: *Women’s Detachment* with Qiming Film Company and two films with Tianle Film Company—a comedy titled *The Ridiculous Matchmaker* and a mystery titled *The*

*Maze of 1000 Miles*.<sup>45</sup> The first film was advertised in *Ling Sing* magazine with “directed by Esther Eng” in the text.<sup>46</sup>

Third, the media portrayed Eng as an ambitious business woman. Dorothy Arzner was signed by Harry Cohn as an associate producer at Columbia Studios in 1934, but “her career as producer really existed only on paper” as none of the two films she was to produce was completed.<sup>47</sup> Esther Eng, under her merchant father’s influence, was a business woman as well as a filmmaker. When she was directing films in Hong Kong in the late 1930s, she simultaneously helped her father purchase films there for American distribution. After WWII, she returned to Hong Kong with 40,000 feet of film, a rare commodity in post-war Hong Kong that could easily be sold for profit if unused.<sup>48</sup> Even though she received many offers of collaboration between late 1946 and early 1947, she made her own calculations and decided to return to the US to make Chinese language films for the Chinese market as the production cost in US at that time was only one-third of that in Hong Kong.<sup>49</sup> She made her trip worthwhile by buying 30 Nanyang pictures before she left in early 1947.<sup>50</sup> As soon as she returned to San Francisco, she made *Lady from the Blue Lagoon* for Grandview and went independent afterwards. She set up her own company Silver Light, losing no time in producing and directing two color pictures back to back between 1947 and 1948: *Back Street* and *Mad Fire Mad*

*Love*, respectively released in 1948 and 1949. A small piece of news relating her correspondence with friends in HK reveals that she investigated in the production mode of B pictures in Hollywood, and thought that an appropriate business model for Hong Kong then.<sup>51</sup> Even after her directing career, she continued working in the film distribution business into the 1960s, not to mention her success as a restaurateur from 1949 to her death in 1970.

The Fourth aspect of Esther Eng covered in the press was that women are attracted to her. The Chinese phrase most often used to describe her is “the man among the women”, but she is also often referred to as a “lass” with “ten thousand miles of ambition.”<sup>52</sup> More sophisticated magazine editors depicted Eng’s sexual ambiguity with awe, calling Wai Kim-fong her “bosom friend” and Lam Siu-mui—a bit actress who ardently pursued Eng romantically—her “good sister.” Yet one young reporter of *Sing Tao Daily News*, Lui Kwan, used a different tone to describe Eng’s same-sex relationships:

“We used to say that Wai Kim-fong was Esther’s bosom friend, but this is not quite right. We should say that Wai was Esther’s lover! ‘Lover,’ you say? Have you ever heard anything stranger? But I’m not lying. Wai and Esther were living proof that the possibility of ‘same-sex love’ exists in this world. ... Maybe it’s because I’m too young, but I’ve never met a person like her nor do I think I likely will in the

future. Man or woman, old or young, everyone called her ‘Brother Ha.’ When Wai Kim-fong got back to Hong Kong, she never stopped addressing her that way, and it just kind of caught on...also, Esther herself liked so much to be called ‘Big Brother,’ a form of address that ought to be reserved for men! To this day, I’ve never once called her anything. As sure as I am that she’s a woman, it makes me nervous and terrified to call her ‘Brother’! At the same time, I don’t want to upset her by calling her ‘miss’ or ‘ma’am’, so every time we see each other, I just greet her with a nod.”<sup>53</sup>

In the 1930s, all-female opera troops existed before men and women could go on the same stage. Eng’s “cross-dressing” did not cause much controversy. Yet this reporter distinguished between the heroines who cross-dressed in Chinese folklores and Eng under the sub-heading “the Mystery of Human Beings:”

“In old China, there was a case of a masculinized woman called Mulan. There were many such men like this in history—Meng Lijun, for instance. No one bats an eye at this. But in the case of Esther, there’s something else that completely bewilders our sense of what’s strange and bizarre with regard to humankind! It’s not just work, address, manner, and dress...it’s her sensibility.”<sup>54</sup>

Lui goes on to summarize Eng's dramatic relationship with Lam Siu-mui, which ended in winter 1938. He also disclosed that, like most lovers in their early 20s, Eng and Wai did not know how to handle their private life in a way that their public image would not be affected. *Ling Sing* magazine announced Eng and Wai's break-up as early as January 26, 1938.<sup>55</sup> Two *Artland* articles in April and June of 1939 confirmed that both Wai and Lam left Hong Kong after breaking up with Eng, showing sympathy to the lonely young woman director and encouraging her to embrace more career opportunities.<sup>56</sup> An article reports her returning to the US in 1939 with much regret, even guessing that maybe her films were too good for the Chinese audience.<sup>57</sup> When she returned to Hong Kong after WWII, *Ling Sing* magazine continued to report on her. In early 1947, several reports detailing her plan to leave, her confirmation of tickets, and her final departure show that the magazine editors remained very interested in Eng.<sup>58</sup>

In 1948, Eng tried to stage a comeback in Hong Kong by bringing *Back Street* and its star Siu Fei Fei to Hong Kong just as she had done with *Heartaches* and Wai Kim-fong in 1936. On the way to Hong Kong, the two stopped over in Hawaii where a local merchant persuaded her to make a picture in Honolulu that he would finance. Her last independent film, *Mad Fire Mad Love* (1949), dubbed “the first Chinese language picture shot in Hawaii,” was soon in production and attracted reports from the *United Chinese News*,

the *Hawaii Chinese Journal*,<sup>59</sup> and even Singapore based and Shaw Studio backed *Screen Voice* magazine, which reported the progress of the picture in detail.<sup>60</sup> Later, overseas Chinese newspapers continued in reporting on her business sojourning in various ports—including those in Cuba and Peru, highlighting how actresses would rush to present their pictures to her.<sup>61</sup> The photos Eng kept in albums dating from 1949 to the 1960s show her moving to New York in 1949 and starting her restaurant business with a very popular Bo Bo. After that, she was a famous and welcoming host to Chinese actresses and actors visiting New York. If Eng was a film director for over a decade, then as a business woman, her career was as long as 30 years.

### Pioneers of Women's Cinema

The directing careers of Dorothy Arzner and Esther Eng lasted for more than a decade partially because “woman’s film” was popular from the 1930s all the way to the early 1960s in both Hollywood and Hong Kong. Although the definition of “woman’s film” original came from the Hollywood tradition, it is, as I argued in detail elsewhere, very relevant to the Chinese context.<sup>62</sup> As Mary Ann Doanne summarizes, a “woman’s film” usually focuses on a female character whose perspective dominates the narration. The films deal with themes of “female problems” such as family, children, and self-sacrifice. Most importantly, however, it targets female



audiences.<sup>63</sup> Jeanne Basinger further points out:

"The woman's film was successful because it worked out a paradox. It both held women in social bondage and released them into a dream of potency and freedom. It drew women in with images of what was lacking in their own lives and sent them home reassured that their own lives were the right thing after all... To convince women that marriage and motherhood were the right path, movies had to show women making the mistake of doing something else."<sup>64</sup>

Arzner's contribution as a director of "woman's film" was acknowledged as early as the 1930s by critics writing for trade magazines, but only studied in detail by feminist scholars after 1975. Judith Mayne's book-length study on Arzner offers very interesting close readings of Arzner's four pictures considered to be "failures" in her time, arguing that the "failures" have a lot to do with how Arzner's understanding of women and their story were at odds with how Hollywood films usually portrayed them. Mayne also pays a lot of attention to Arzner's identity as both a woman and an out lesbian, comparing her situation with those of other directors of woman's film, many gay.<sup>65</sup> While recognizing "how vital gay sensibilities—the fluidity of gender roles" help a gay director to direct actresses much more interestingly, Mayne also asserts that being "a woman and a 'woman's director'" is "a little like being a lesbian: one is assumed

to be a woman acting like a man acting like a woman.”<sup>66</sup> Although most scholars agree that Arzner’s work “conveyed women’s lives, desires, and experiences on screen” through focusing on “women’s friendships” and “women’s communities” and often with the creative involvement from female script writers, costume designers, and dance choreographers, they also note how in her films, “women are never identified in a simple or isolated way.”<sup>67</sup> One might think of Arzner’s films as a way of talking back to Hollywood’s portrayal of women.

From the synopses of her films, we can tell that Esther Eng was always sympathetic with the female characters, showing particular compassion to women who cannot manage to maintain a “normal” marriage and family. Not being able to examine Eng’s film works,<sup>68</sup> it is hard to go into further discussion on how exactly she presents the female characters and how female subjectivity is constructed in her pictures. Yet, two films of hers are interesting in the context of woman’s film.

The first was Eng’s fifth Hong Kong pictures, *It’s a Women’s World* (aka *36 Amazons*, 1939) also co-written by her. This film’s original title, *36 Amazons*, pairs a number that has a Chinese symbolic meaning of “all-embracing” with an English word referring to the fiercest of female warriors. As this title was not easy for

ordinary Chinese to understand, the film was released under a different title, *It's a Women's World*, which nonetheless carries a strong message. Advertised as the first film made in Hong Kong with an all-female cast of 36 actresses, the film was released seven months earlier than MGM's *The Women* by gay director George Cukor, which also involves a large all-female cast—130 speaking roles.<sup>69</sup> In *It's a Women's World*, the harsh reality for the women in the societies and communities in which they live is always present. The very idea of making a film that includes female characters with 36 different social positions speaks to Eng's creative energy and ambition. In the film, she does not prioritize certain women over the others or promote the image of virtuous wives and good mothers. Arzner did not do this either.

The second "woman's film" that I want to discuss here is Eng's *Back Street* (1948), which is based on American writer Fannie Hurst's 1931 best seller of the same title. This film was the first picture Eng produced for her own film company, Silver Light. In Eng's photo collection, there is not even one still of her films made in Hong Kong, but only a few location shots. Among her films made in American, only *Golden Gate Girl* and *Mad Fire Mad Love* have a few stills, yet nearly 30 large prints of *Back Street* stills—some hand-tinted—are found, showing how significant this film was to her. The novel was adapted into a screenplay by Hurst herself and made

into a movie in 1932. It enjoyed two remakes later on, respectively, in 1941 and 1961. There is no evidence of whether Eng read the original novel, but it is most likely she watched the 1932 or the 1941 version of the film, or both.<sup>70</sup> An open letter Eng wrote to *Ling Sing's* editor mentions her involvement in the making of *Back Street*:

“It has been months since we parted in Hong Kong. I missed you very much. Please forgive me for not writing earlier as I have been very busy since returning to the US. After completing *Lady from the Blue Lagoon*, I traveled around South America on film business. Upon my return, I planned to shoot *Blood over the Bridge* starring Hu Dieli, but since she could not come to San Francisco, I made *Back Street* instead. Siu Fei Fei, Ronald Liu, and Xue Yinghong play the main roles. ... The shooting has wrapped and I am in the middle of editing. It will arrive in Hong Kong soon.”<sup>71</sup>

Further, as she was able to make *Back Street* in less than two months, it must have been a story she was very familiar with and prepared to shoot.

I believe the reasons why Eng chose to adapt *Back Street* are at least two-fold. On one hand, the theme of *Back Street* is one Eng kept returning to: unfulfilled love. The plot concerns a beautiful, intelligent, and independent woman, who falls in love with a man

after spending a day together with him. The woman agrees to be with him but then fails to meet him at their agreed upon place of rendezvous. When they meet again later, he is already married, but they cannot let go of their feelings for each other. The woman remains his mistress, not living in an actual “back street” of his city but in a luxurious apartment in another city. On the other hand, this tragic romance is a tale of two cities, which allows Eng to move between San Francisco and China. Since her audience was mainly Chinese, China was often included as a symbolic or actual location in her films. Her last two films *Mad Fire Mad Love* refers to China as a land of hope and happiness for the heroine, while *Murder in New York Chinatown* portrays China as the homeland that new immigrants left behind.

There seems to be at least one more reason, as indicated in an article based on an interview with Eng by the *Seattle Intelligencer's* columnist Frank Lynch:

“Chinese pictures are not like American pictures. We learned that right off the bat. Put on a funny picture, said Miss Eng—pretty enough to act herself—and the Chinese audience will just sit there, never moving an eyelash. Ask them about it on the way out, and they will say “good, good.” But don’t let that fool you. They are just being polite. On the other hand, if they come out with tear-stained

faces, don't mind if they brush right by. They're hurrying to tell their friends. Tragedy! They Love it.”<sup>72</sup>

According to Lynch's notes, Eng chose to direct *Back Street* because it is a tragedy. This vivid depiction by Lynch reveals Eng's awareness of the difference between American and Chinese audiences, which is not surprising. *Back Street*'s originally advertised Chinese title literally means “Too Late For Spring”, but the release title carried the meaning of “The Love in Vain”, which puts heavier emphasis on the romantic or the erotic. Yet, Esther totally felt the limitation in making a Chinese film erotic:

“Miss Eng said that she had to be very careful with love scenes. The Chinese think this boy-girl stuff very private, indeed, so no long kissing scenes. Just the odd short ones, as a sop to the younger generation. How do they respond to those? Miss Eng gave a sharp whistle. Chinese actresses are modest too, they insist on wearing clothes. No sun suits, no bathing suits, no, oh, my, goodness, no bubble baths. Rather die first.”<sup>73</sup>

Other pictures of Eng also had titles changed. *Heartaches* was changed to *Iron Blood Fragrant Soul* when it was release in Hong Kong to place a stronger connotation of the war content over the plot of romance. Her Hawaii film had been called *Traces over a*

*Barren Island* before it was renamed *Mad Fire Mad Love*. All these changes are carefully considered in both cultural contexts and recalls Esther Eng's own decision to change her name before making any films. Esther Eng's birth name was NG Kam Ha. No one could pronounce her name in English. Even her teachers in school would sometimes call her Miss N-G. In filmmaking, "NG" means "no good"—a shot needs to be repeated if the director calls out "NG." According to Esther's sister Sally Ng, Esther thought if she would make movies, her names could not be "Ng" and so she added an E to it and changed her family name into "Eng."<sup>74</sup>

Yet, Lynch summarizes the film plot without a single reference to Fannie Hurst, her novel, nor the 1932 and 1941 Hollywood adaptations. This is ironic, especially when considering how the great American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald borrowed the voice of a character in his first novel *This Side of Paradise* to criticize Hurst as one of several authors "not producing among 'em one story or novel that will last 10 years."<sup>75</sup> If the three Hollywood adaptations of *Back Street* from the 1930s to 1960s have proved the timelessness of this story about a woman's love and sacrifice, Eng's remake in 1947 affirms the relevance of the story within different cultural contexts.<sup>76</sup> I want to suggest that Eng's adaptation of *Back Street* can be seen as an evidence for the argument that women's cinema is not only a counter cinema, it is also world cinema. The "female" problems

dealt with in the films have the ability to cross cultural borders.

When we look at the history of women directors in America, it is generally accepted that Arzner was preceded “in the silent era by Lois Weber and Alice Guy Blaché and followed in the 1950s by Ida Lupino.”<sup>77</sup> While not considered in film histories, following Arzner’s retirement in 1943 and Lupino’s directional debut in late 1949, Esther Eng was the only woman directing feature films in America. She produced three color talkies in a row during this period. Without considering this factor, the trajectory of women directors in America would have been broken with a six-year gap. At the same time, Eng’s significance lies in her position as the pioneer leading the trajectory of women directors in China as one of the earliest female contributors to women’s cinema.

Eng’s success was important as she was the first woman in the Chinese film industry to sustain her director’s career over many years, producing a body of successful works. She set herself up as an excellent example to the film industry that a woman could direct a picture with a unique way of addressing the audience. Shortly before she left Hong Kong in late 1939, a woman named Wan Hoi-ling also began to direct pictures. Wan’s directing career in Hong Kong proved to be short lived, but her migration from Shanghai to Hong Kong and further down south to Malaysia, can also be seen as paralleling



Eng's diasporic experiences.<sup>78</sup> At least one magazine article suggests that Eng's presence was a great encouragement for women to follow her steps in trying to direct.<sup>79</sup> During the 12 year gap between Eng's making of *Mad Fire Mad Love* in 1949 and her last picture *Murder in New York Chinatown* in 1961, Ren Yizhi became a full-fledged woman director in Hong Kong, with 19 directorial credits under her name. Together with later women directors in Hong Kong, including Chu Feng, Cecile Tang, Kao Pao-shu, Florence Yu, Ann Hui, Rachel Zen, Angela Mak, Angelica Chen, Sylvia Chang, Mabel Cheung, Clara Law, Jacky Pang, Casey Chan, Barbara Wong, Aubrey Lam, Carol Lai, Mak Yan-yan, Heyward Mak etc., these women form one of the world's longest, unbroken trajectories of women directors. For a women's cinema with Hong Kong characteristics, Eng began a tradition that later Hong Kong women directors have carried on: addressing the concern over ordinary women's conditions of living, how gender troubles are related to social transformation, and the gendered aspects of diasporic and ocean-crossing experiences. Thanks to such a continuously renewed tradition, women's cinema in Hong Kong has served powerfully as an alternative cinema, if not a counter cinema.

S. Louisa Wei, Associate Professor of School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong.

PHOTOS used in this essay, where not otherwise described, belong to the joint “Esther Eng Photo Collection” and its ultimate co-proprietors James Wong & Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA). By special permission from the co-proprietors, individual projects by S.Louisa Wei, Law Kar and Frank Bren may use images from that collection (as here) but no other person or entity may exploit any images seen here from that collection, without express permission by the two co-proprietors named above.

## Notes

1. 'She Wears Slacks' is a subheading in Betty Cornelius 'Esther Eng, Movie Maker, Visits Here' in *The Seattle Times*, June 9, 1946. I want to thank Law Kar and Frank Bren for sharing research materials, Sally Ng and David Wells for sharing pictures, and Casey M. Lee for reading through this essay.
2. Richard B. Jewell defines the period to be 1929-1945 in his *The Golden Age of Cinema: Hollywood 1929-1945*, Blackwell, 2007. Claire Johnston and Pam Cook's essays on Dorothy Arzner explained why the rediscovery of this woman director and her work was meaningful. See Claire Johnston ed. *The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema*, BFI, 1975.
3. Todd McCarthy, 'Eng's Lost Pix a Chinese Puzzle' in *Variety*, August 21-27, 1995, p.10.
4. Law Kar and Frank Bren, 'The Esther Eng Story' in *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, Scarecrow Press, 2004, p.91-105.
5. Law Kar, 'In Search of Esther Eng: Border-crossing Pioneer in Chinese-language Filmmaking' in Lingzhen Wang ed. *Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Contexts*, Columbia University Press, 2011, p.313.
6. Feature documentary *Golden Gate Girls* (aka *Golden Gate Silver Light*) is directed by S. Louisa Wei, sponsored by Hong Kong Art Development Council, produced by Blue Queen Cultural Communication Ltd., and premiered in the Hong Kong International Film Festival in 2013.
7. An article in *Historical Documents of Shanghai Cinema*, Vol. II edited by Shanghai Film Bureau in 1994 claims that Xie Caizhen directed a film titled *An Orphan's Cry* in 1925 for Nanxing Film Company, but there is also conflicting evidence in *Shun Pao* showing that the director's name was Xie Yunqing. So whether if Xie Caizhen was the director is yet to be ascertained.
8. The most famous example of woman director having her rise and fall during and after WWII is of course Leni Riefenstahl, who was accused for being part of Adolf Hitler's propaganda machine.
9. Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary, 'Interview with Dorothy Arzner' in *The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema*, Ed. Claire Johnston, BFI, 1975, p.19.
10. See note 9, p.19.
11. See note 9, p.20.

12. See note 9, p.22-23.
13. Judith Mayne, *Directed by Dorothy Arzner*, Indiana University Press, 1994, p.57-59.
14. This is evidence in the fact that she kept two large prints of aviators in her photo collections, with personal notes to her on the photos.
15. 'Esther Eng's Screen Appearance and Other Stories' in *Artland*, June 1, 1939. This article indicates that Eng appeared as a child star in films, but this is not backed by other sources.
16. 'Film Company New Name' in *Chinese Digest*, 1:6, December 20, 1935.
17. Betty Cornelius, 'Esther Eng, Movie Maker, Visits Here' in *The Seattle Times*, June 9, 1946.
18. 'All-Chinese Film Made' in *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1935.
19. "'Heartaches' to Be Shown This Week' in *Chinese Digest*, 2:7, February 14, 1936.
20. Can Xiang, 'A Sketch of the Ladies' Welcoming Party' in *Rose*, No. 11, 1936.
21. See note 18.
22. *Nam Keung Yat Po* (Hong Kong) advertised *Heartaches* as a picture 'produced by Esther Eng' and 'not to be missed' in its June 28, 1936 issue. It printed only Esther Eng as the producer, dropping the name of her co-producer Bruce Wong. The last of the 'five records' is not proved as existing records only show that *Heartaches* was mainly played in the Chinese theatres of San Francisco.
23. 'Esther Eng Would Not Leave Homeland' in *Ling Sing*, No.208, August 29, 1937.
24. 'China's First Woman Director' in *Artland*, July 11, 1937. 'Esther Eng Aborted Her Trip to America and Prepares to Welcome Spring Here' in *Ling Sing*, August 29, 1937.
25. For description of Arzner, see 'Distaff Side Director' in *The New York Times*, September 27, 1936, p.X, 4; and also see Marguerite Tazelaar, 'Meeting Miss Dorothy Arzner, Screen's Only Woman Director,' *Herald Tribune*, November 16, 1930. For description of Eng, see 'Lien Fa Saw You' in *Chinese Digest*, Vol 2: No.19, May 8, 1936, p.3.
26. See note 17.
27. Grace Wilcox, 'Hilltop Tenant,' *Screen and Radio Weekly*, n.d. (1936).
28. Ann Sylvester, 'Make Way for the Ladies,' *Picture Play Magazine*, December 1927.
29. See note 9, p.23.

30. Sheridan Morley, *Katharine Hepburn*, Pavilion, 1989, p.39.
31. Katherine Hepburn, *Me: Stories of My Life*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1991, p.144-45.
32. See note 13, p.71-74.
33. This news clipping is found in an album kept by Sally Ng, with dates marked as February 5, 1931, but subsequent research done by researchers Frank Bren and David Wells has confirmed the clipping's exact print date as December 5, 1930 and the newspaper is *San Francisco Chronicle*. Refer to Frank Bren's remark on p.65, note 11.
34. 'Esther Eng Decides to Return to US in September' in *Artland*, July 1, 1939.
35. 'Woman Movie Picture Director' in *New York Sun*, September 23, 1930. The article writes of how 'Miss Arzner's climb into the front rank of picturedom would supply the plot for a feminine Horatio Alger story that might well be entitled 'From Typist to Movie Director, or How One Girl Took a Job and Grew Up with It'.'
36. 'Southern China's Woman Director Esther Eng Has a Way for Business' in *Guoran Daily News*, October 27, 1946.
37. Ah Ding, 'When Will the Woman Director Return? Esther Eng Will Get into News Business in Hong Kong' in *Ling Sing*, No.2, February 16, 1946.
38. Wern, 'Golden Gate Girl' in *Variety*, May 28, 1941.
39. Film critic Todd McCarthy sees this film in relation to more recent 'immigrant sagas' like *Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart* (1985) and *The Joy Luck Club* (1993), but the theme of the film was a nationalist one and its story was set in the background of the 'Bowl of Rice Movement', McCarthy, p.10.
40. These two phrases are from the lobby poster of *Golden Gate Girl* when it was screened in San Francisco in 1941.
41. See note 17.
42. Then she was preparing a script with old friend, Nanyang director Wu Peng and worked for several months. In the end, Nanyang dropped the project, and she decided to return. 'China's Only Woman Director Esther Eng Is Eager to Return to US' in *Sing Tao Evening News*, January 12, 1947.

43. 'Esther Eng's Plan to Return Is Shattered by the Canons' in *Ling Sing*, No.211, August 7, 1937.
44. 'Frail Esther Eng Sees a Ghost' in *Artland*, No.48, February 15, 1939.
45. 'The Rumor about Esther Eng's Returning to the US,' in *Artland*, December 15, 1938.
46. *Ling Sing Pictorial*, August 7, 1938.
47. See note 13, p.68.
48. See note 37.
49. 'China's Only Woman Director Esther Eng Is Eager to Return to America' in *Sing Tao Evening News*, January 12, 1947.
50. 'Esther Eng Travelled on Sea Snake' in *Ling Sing*, No.138, January 15 1947.
51. See note 4, p.97.
52. 'Esther Eng's Tremendous Ambition' in *Shing Po News*, December 22, 1946.
53. Lei Qun, 'Female Director Esther Eng' in *Sing Tao Daily News*, December 15, 1938.
54. See note 53.
55. 'Wai Kim-fong Left Esther Eng' in *Ling Sing*, No.219, January 26, 1938.
56. 'Two Matters about Esther Eng' in *Artland*, No.55, April 1, 1939. 'Esther Eng Going on Screen and Other Matters' in *Artland*, No.57, June 1, 1939.
57. 'Esther Eng Decided to Return to US in September' in *Artland*, July 1, 1939.
58. 'Esther Eng Is To Leave on the Sea Snake, see note 50; 'Alas, Esther Eng Left for America This Morning' in *Ling Sing*, February 13, 1947.
59. 'Esther Eng Borrowed Cathay Club to Film at Night' in *The United Chinese News*, October 4, 1948; 'Hawaii's First Chinese Movie Will Have Premiere Here Soon' in *Hawaii Chinese Journal*, November 11, 1948.
60. Yin Xing, 'Sketches on *Mad Fire Mad Love*' in *Screen Voice*, No. 153, p.15, 1949.
61. 'Entertainment News' in *Kai Ming Kong Po* (Havana, Cuba), October 6, 1947.
62. S. Louisa Wei, 'A Century of Screen Women and the Development of Woman's Film Tradition' in *Chinese Cinema History Study: Film Culture Volume*, China Film Press, 2005, p.439-503.

63. Mary Ann Doanne, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, Indiana University Press, 1987, p.3.
64. Jeanne Basinger, *A Women's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960*, Wesleyan University Press, 1993, p.6.
65. George Cukor, in particular, is brought up in discussion, because his career paths intersected several times with Arzner's in the sense that one needed to stand in for a project that the other could not complete.
66. See note 13, p.62-63.
67. See note 13, p.93.
68. Only two of her ten works have been found: *Golden Gate Girl* (1940) and *Murder in New York Chinatown* (1961). Both films happen to be co-directed with relatively influential male directors: Kwan Man-ching gets credits for co-director, writer and editor for *Golden Gate Girl*, while Wu Peng was billed as the primary director for the latter even though there is ample evidence of Eng's participation in the writing the story. My documentary *Golden Gate Girls* records Chor Yuen, who is credited as the writer of the film, denied writing the story and attributed the film entirely to Esther Eng. None of her diaries and letters etc. have been found. Besides the full scripts of *Heartaches* and *Golden Gate Girl*, the only existing sources are press releases, advertisement, synopses, and occasionally long reports on the making of the film.
69. The film might be understood as a predecessor to *Sex and the City* inasmuch as it features actresses clad in typical Hollywood glamour while fulfilling the twofold task of 'woman's film': to entertain the women and to make them feel marriage and children are the best for them.
70. If she missed the American release of the 1932 version, the film was shown in Hong Kong in 1936 when Eng was there. By the time the 1941 version was in theatre, Eng was in America and just finished *Golden Gate Girl*.
71. 'Esther Eng Toured South America, *Back Street* Is Completed' in *Ling Sing*, February 19, 1948.
72. Frank Lynch, 'Tragedy! They Love It' in the 'Seattle Scene' column of *Seattle Intelligencer*, August 1947.

73. See note 72.
74. A newspaper article also records this story. See 'Bathing Beauty's Female Star and South China's Woman Director: The Name of Esther' in *Sing Po*, January 29, 1947.
75. F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'This Side of Paradise' in *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Heinemann/Octopus, 1977, p.457. This reminds me of how American critics at the time, who favored male writers of the 'Lost Generation' (including Fitzgerald), also criticize Pearl S. Buck's novel as lacking artistry. Yet Buck and Hurst showed a much more superior understanding of race and gender than these male writers.
76. As if to echo Eng's resetting of the story into two countries, the 1961 remake lends more freedom to the heroine by allowing her to reside in Rome, where her love still lives New York City, which appears in the novel and all three Hollywood films. For the convenience of shooting, Eng shot the film in San Francisco, which replaces New York City. An interesting sidelight is that, if Eng made this film after 1949, she perhaps would keep New York City as well, since she lived the last 20 years of her life in there.
77. Jane Gaines, 'Dorothy Arzner's Trousers' in *Jump Cut*, No. 37, July 1992, p.88.
78. Frank Bren, 'Woman in White: The Unbelievable Wan Hoi-ling' in *Hong Kong Film Archive Newsletter*, No.65, August 2013, p.10-15.
79. 'Cheng Man-ha Became Woman Director after Esther Eng and Wan Hoi-ling' in *Artland*, Nov 15, 1939.



# 尹海靈

## —— 謎樣的女導演

—— 法蘭賓

半年來不斷發掘電影導演尹海靈的生平成就，偶然會聯想起西方文學一些同樣神秘的女主角，如韋基柯林斯的《白衣女郎》（1860）和維拉卡斯帕里的《蘿拉》（1943）。<sup>1</sup>

尹海靈真有其人，不是神秘女主角，卻是香港電影史上最不可思議地被遺忘的人物。

單是以下列出她的片目，已足夠令本文的研究站得住腳。她所執導電影，的確曾在戲院公映過，而其時的宣傳廣告也證實了她於1937至47年間曾負責編劇或導演（多是合導）。可惜，即使花上六個月也找不到她的生卒年月和地點。然而，這個研究將會繼續下去，因為尹氏確是個人物。

### 從侯曜（1903?-1942?）的故事了解尹海靈

為了認識尹海靈這個人，且讓我引述香港戲院商會慷慨提供的文件《尹海靈與尹海清資料》。<sup>2</sup>（尹海清是尹海靈胞弟，也是電影編導。）這份不知出自何人的資料讓人很感興

趣：兩姐弟資料「不詳，《中國電影大辭典》亦未有介紹。」  
「尹海靈是我國最早期的電影女導演，單從這一點，足以說明她鮮明的個性及獨創性。」「尹海清與姐姐尹海靈曾從師中國電影界第一代導演、中國早期電影理論的拓荒者之一侯曜。」引用陳正茂所著的《逝去的虹影：現代人物述評》<sup>3</sup>一書，文中言道「1945年，抗戰勝利前夕，侯曜遭人檢舉，不幸於新加坡為日軍捕殺，享年46歲。」（有些人對他的卒年抱有懷疑，但一般都同意是在1942至45年間。）

正如以上香港戲院商會的資料所示，我們越了解侯曜，就會越了解尹海靈。可是侯曜究竟是怎麼樣的一個人？他是電影詩人、義勇軍、為人浪漫、愛情美滿、護國愛民、因反日而被殺。他還是個思想家，媲美電影理論家路易德呂克（1890-1924）、普多夫金（1893-1953）和杜魯福（1932-84）等。侯曜1926年有關電影製作的著作，至今仍為人參考。<sup>4</sup>

作為編導，尹海靈對香港電影第一個黃金時代（約1936至41年）的貢獻似乎已無異議；1937年，她還在《沙漠之花》



圖一 尹海靈

Fig 1 Wan Hoi-ling

（1937）的特刊上寫了一篇文章，宣傳侯曜這部根據自己的同名小說所改編的「國防電影」，尹更在電影中首次演出，同時擔任助理編劇及場記。

正如該文所示，尹海靈其實早在多年前已學拍電影。她之所以公開讚賞侯曜，是因為侯曜把電影視為寓教育於娛樂；而且字裡行間，也很欣賞主張男女平等（侯曜是當時公認中國戲劇界的「易卜生」，在這方面曾與當編劇的妻子濮舜卿觀點一致）。尹海靈寫道：「我因為跟隨侯先生做事數年，且又曾經將這本《沙漠之花》的小說，幫同着改編電影劇本……大概是十年前罷，侯先生在聯華影片公司任導演的時候，便將《沙漠之花》的本事寫好了。後來，因為他捨棄了那銀燈的生活，去過戎馬生涯，因此，《沙漠之花》無人任導演，便擱置了下來！」她點出侯曜當年參加過少人知曉的東北義勇較軍，那是滿洲事變後唯一抵抗日本侵略的遊擊隊。<sup>5</sup> 她還說剛進入1930年代中期，侯曜定居香港，「便將《沙漠之花》本事，演繹而成長篇小說，刊載於《工商晚報》。」到1937年，她和其他人終於勸服了侯曜，將小說改編，拍成電影。



圖二 《沙漠之花》特刊封面，  
上有編導侯曜相片

Fig 2 The Desert Flower brochure  
with a photo of the film's writer-  
director Hou Yao.



圖三 《沙漠之花》：由「華南影帝」吳楚帆和夫人「半  
開玫瑰」黃笑鶯主演

Fig 3 Husband-and-wife team in *The Desert Flower* – Ng  
Cho-fan, the 'Movie King of South China', and Wong Siu-  
hing, better known as the 'Half-bloomed Rose'.

## 侯曜 (1903?-1942?)

在該本宣傳特刊上，他的朋友「堅」形容他「是廣東番禺人，年三十九，東吳大學文學士，樣子生得很怪，額頭高又上去，眼近視，面上有疤痕各一，加以頭髮長長，一望而知是藝術家！」<sup>6</sup>

從香港電影資料館出版的《香港影片大全（第一卷）（1913-1941）》（1997），也許可以猜想到為甚麼一直沒人把尹海靈當成本港首位土生土長的女性專業電影人。《大全》內雖記錄了她的作品，個人資料卻欠奉，而且「海靈」這名字中性，讓不少人以為她是「男子」。<sup>7</sup>

1939至41年，她執導影片的數量最多，期間有兩位男士與她合作無間，對她當上導演影響深遠。一個是洪仲豪，即洪金寶祖父；另一個就是侯曜，她的導師、好搭檔，後來更成為情人。

有兩位女性象徵着侯曜電影生涯的兩段時期——默片時期和有聲片時期。第一位是在中國大陸的濮舜卿（1902-?）<sup>8</sup>，她是著名劇作家，侯曜的合法妻子及舞台和電影創作上的好搭檔，今被譽為中國電影首位女編劇。另一位是侯曜在香港和新加坡拍攝有聲片時期的得力助手尹海靈，早在拍攝《沙漠之花》前就衷心折服於侯曜的價值理念（這從上述她所寫的文章可見）。

引用尹海靈文章的話，侯曜「自做完了東北義勇軍，抗日工作之後，暫寄萍蹤於香島」；「侯先生的出任《沙漠之花》的導演，既不是為利，也不是為名，實在是要創造國防的影片，為中華民族建立一條精神的陣線。侯先生這一種用心，是多麼的值得欽佩啊！」<sup>9</sup>

侯曜與一位虛構的反納粹英雄——米高寇蒂斯經典作品《北非諜影》（1942）中的角色維特（保羅亨利飾）——頗有相似之處。不幸的是，這些相似的地方，令侯曜最終成了日本特務

暗殺的對象，或許他居港時已有人想殺他，畢竟香港在太平洋戰爭中也是兵慌馬亂，諜影重重。

### 紐約州資料館—尋覓香港電影遺珠

尹海靈和其他1942年前的電影作品失佚，已無可挽回。然而，位於紐約州阿爾巴尼的紐約州資料館倒可提供一些新線索。該館號稱擁有世上最多電影劇本，裡面珍藏了二十年代至1965年一批送呈紐約州政府審批的電影劇本。

該館堪稱香港電影歷史學家的「芝蔴開門」。館藏其中一份香港劇本，是在1939年輪候審批的《The Rebel》，劇本載導演是香港首位為人所知的女監製唐醒圖。該片於1937年6月1日在香港首映時，名為《溫生才炸孚琦》，導演為林蒼。

根據紐約州資料館的電影劇本索引紀錄，單是「香港」一項就有逾2,400個條目，當中有尹海靈和侯曜合作的作品，在以下的片目中以\*號標示。<sup>10</sup>

### 尹海靈片目（一）香港學徒時期<sup>11</sup>

1. 1937/5/20（香港公映）《沙漠之花》，編劇導演侯曜，尹為助理編劇及演員兼主唱插曲





圖四至七 尹海靈師從侯曜的《太平洋上的風雲》（1938）

Fig 4-7 Wan as Hou Yao's deputy on *Incident in the Pacific* (1938).

2. 1938/1/13 《理想未婚妻》，編劇、總導演侯曜，導演馮志剛，尹為助理編劇
3. \*1938/4/7 《太平洋上的風雲》，編劇導演侯曜，尹為助導兼助理編劇
4. \*1938/5/7 《女戰士》，導演高梨痕，尹為編劇
5. 1938/6/15 《血肉長城》，編劇導演侯曜，尹為助導
6. 1938/8/14 《周氏反嫁》，導演侯曜，尹為編劇
7. \*1938/10/18 《錯點鴛鴦》，導演侯曜，尹為編劇
8. 1938/12/11 《粉粧樓》（又名《胡奎賣人頭》），導演侯曜及洪仲豪，尹為編劇



圖八至十一 侯曜在其自編自導的《血肉長城》（1938）中主演愛國教授

Fig 8-11 Hou Yao played a patriotic professor in his self-directed/written *Fortress of Flesh and Blood* (1938).

## 9. 1939/1/26《真假武則天》，導演洪仲豪，尹為編劇

尹海靈從1937到1939年的學徒時期，拍了九部長片<sup>12</sup>，在其中五部擔任編劇，包括《真假武則天》（香港，1939/1/26公映）。這部片被歸類為「時裝/社教片」有點奇怪，因為其內容是古代武則天荒淫無度的「時裝版」，想來是以輕快手法，拿已成濫調的唐朝宮闈秘史加以時空錯位實驗。憑這點看來，實在沒有理由相信她還會回頭去當別人的「助手」，她已有充足準備來執導演筒。



尹海靈片目（二）

香港聯合編導時期（1939-40）

10. 1939/3/16（香港公映）《鍾無艷》，與侯曜合導
11. 1939/4/23《狸貓換太子包公夜審郭槐》，與洪仲豪合導
12. 1939/4/25《姜太公》，與侯曜合導
13. 1939/5/25《鳳嬌投水》，與洪仲豪合導
14. \*1939/7/3《呂蒙正祭灶》，與洪仲豪合導
15. \*1939/7/12《賣怪魚龜山起禍》，與侯曜合導
16. \*1939/8/12《孝子亂經堂》，與侯曜合導
17. 1939/12/1《桂枝告狀》，與侯曜合導
18. 1939/12/24《武潘安》，與洪仲豪合導
19. 1940/1/1《中國野人王》，與侯曜合導
20. 1940/2/28《薛剛大鬧花燈》，與洪仲豪合導

首部自編自導的作品

21. 1940/4/10（首映），1940/4/25《觀音得道》

1937年，邵氏兄弟有限公司（新加坡）宣佈會為當地馬來語市場拍攝馬來語電影。<sup>13</sup> 為此，他們於1940年從香港招攬了侯曜和尹海靈，因為那時兩人已為邵氏在香港的其他片廠拍過好些賣座電影。侯曜自言於1940年4月15日乘搭意大利郵船公司Lloyd Triestino 的Conte Verde號，抵達新加坡。<sup>14</sup> 在計劃開拍的馬來語電影中，《Mutiarā》被宣傳為系列的「第

圖十二 尹海靈首部獨立執導作品《觀音得道》（1940），由侯曜監製，二人並粉墨登場（《華僑日報》，1940年4月23日）

Fig 12 Executive-produced by Hou Yao, *The Goddess* (1940) was the first film Wan directed entirely on her own. The pair also played a part in the film. (*Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 23 April 1940)



一部」（見下）。據現有資料顯示，以下七部（片目第22-28部）均由侯曜和尹海靈聯合編導：

### 尹海靈片目（三）

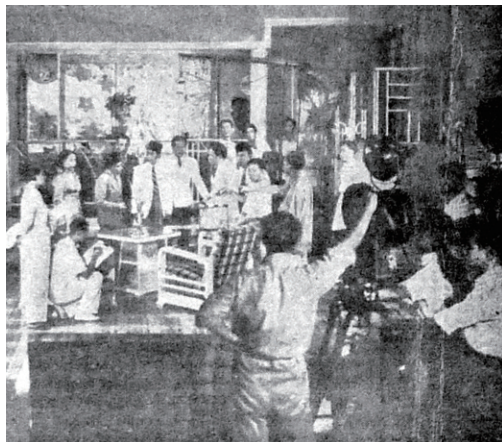
#### 新加坡時期（1940-41）（馬來語）

22. 1940/7/23（新加坡公映）《Mutiarā》（珍珠）
23. 1940/11/26（首映），1940/12/3《Bermadu》（一夫多妻）
24. 1941/4/9《Toping Saitan》（惡魔的面具）
25. 1941/7/1《Hanchor Hati》（心痛）
26. 1941/9/27《Ibu Tiri》（後母）
27. 1941/10/21《Terang Bulan di Malaya》（月滿馬來亞）（片目未完，下續）



圖十三 尹海靈1940年代初隨侯曜加盟星洲邵氏

Fig 13 In the early 1940s, Wan followed Hou Yao into Singapore's Shaw Brothers Limited.



圖十四 侯曜在《月滿馬來亞》(1941)拍攝現場

Fig 14 Hou Yao on the set of *Full Moon over Malaya* (1941).

Film Malaya, Singapore, 1 August 1941  
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Acknowledgements: Dr Annabel Gallop

1941年12月7日（美國時間），日本偷襲珍珠港的美國海軍基地，引發了太平洋戰爭。12月8日（新加坡時間），日本轟炸星洲，噩耗逐漸逼近……1942年2月15日，日本軍接受當時被英兵守衛的新加坡正式投降。尹海靈和侯曜雙雙被困危城……

### 劫後重生

整整三年半之後，日本終於在1945年8月15日棄械投降。

不到四個月後，即1945年12月19日，新加坡推出中文娛樂雜誌《娛樂》。發行五期之後（即1946年1月5日第六期），其「銀幕」的專欄作家發掘出昔日女導演尹海靈，於1940-1941年間在新加坡所拍攝的馬來語電影。尹海靈滯留新加坡期間，就像許多華人一樣，忍受着日本侵略者的漫長統治。這

些無恥日軍，屠殺了她手無寸鐵的愛人侯曜，可惜侯曜遇害日期仍未能確定。<sup>15</sup>

該專欄作家寫道：「華南女導演尹海靈女士，在日本統治時代，她改行開咖啡店於大世界，頭家兼估俚，在清苦中過活。」當英國官員着手恢復新加坡戰前的管治時，大眾的好奇心，又再轉向這位已被公認為星洲前衛導演的尹海靈身上。

可是當有「某電影公司」對她招攬時，卻被她拒絕。是哪家公司（中華電影製片廠，還是邵氏？），仍是個謎。報導說她「時裝艷服」，經常「滿面春風」。究竟她為甚麼選擇開店而不是拍電影？是甚麼令她這樣快樂？答案是，後繼有人：

「『我今已為人師，授人以歌舞及電影演出的表情技術，這就是我的志願。』她說：『我的志願達到，我自然快樂，我的學生僅一名（本坡中華學校交際名花林芸靈女士），她今年廿一歲，善粵曲，有胡美倫的歌喉，我初步教法每星期授予歌舞二小時，及電影理論二小時，林女士活潑聰明，為我之得意學生，我相信將來在電影界必有偉大的貢獻。』另外，這位學生還『跟尹女士讀戀愛經準備與男明星談愛情(!?)』也許是讓她與男明星演熾熱的愛情戲時，能保持清醒的專業技巧吧。尹海靈除了教電影理論，也傳授實際拍片知識。」

尹海靈還透露，她不是那種呼之則來的導演：「此時還未到做導演的時機，同時自己也不配做大公司的導演。」那位專欄作家說：「以她的答辭當然不是改行到底，有機會當再出山的。」

那個機會很快來了。尹海靈重出江湖，斷然投身拍片，時間不會遲於1946年8月。

已故新加坡資深媒體人馮仲漢主編的精彩書籍《居安思危：大戰前後新馬史料彙編》<sup>16</sup>所言，新加坡透過電影，來撫平1942至1945年間的戰爭傷口。尤其是早期於1946及1947年三部由中華電影製片廠出品的影片。

其中首部為人所知的影片《華僑血淚》（蔡問津導演，新加坡，1946），由中華電影製片廠的繆康義和林振聲出品。從1946年7月底開始，於新加坡阿罕布拉劇院（Alhambra Theatre）試映，然後12月在牙力士戲院（Garrick Theatre）上映。兩位出品人接下來的兩部電影，就是由尹海靈自編自導（下見第29、30兩部）。

### 尹海靈片目（三）（續）

還有至少一部戰後在砂拉越放映過的影片：

28. 1946/11/29 《Tiga Kekaseh》（三個情人），莉莉亞戲院  
（根據《砂拉越論壇報》）

尹海靈片目（四）個人編／導（華語）

29. 1946/12/5（新加坡公映）《海外征魂》  
30. 1947/10/8《南洋小姐》

兩部影片都曾在新加坡的大華戲院上映。

馮仲漢在《居安思危：大戰前後新馬史料彙編》第247頁上說：這類「在馬來亞本土拍攝的抗日電影」包括以上提到的三部由中華電影製片廠出品的影片（其中兩部由尹海靈導演）。「這些影片是當地出資，由華人電影的天才導演執導，如Wu Cun和尹海靈。」影片主題皆圍繞馬來亞華人在日軍鐵蹄下的生活苦況，以及人民反抗不義的英勇行為。馮仲漢補充說：影片因「日軍留下」的拍攝儀器太舊，「製作粗糙」，但「內容嚴謹，考察詳細。」

尹海靈最後個人編導的兩部新加坡電影（1946-47），毫無疑問是對痛失愛侶和在新加坡日治期間（1942-45）飽受牢獄之苦作出回應。這兩部片大概是她一生最淒冷、最孤獨的作品；據說後者更以銀幕上罕見的戰時慰安婦為題材。<sup>17</sup>

這之後尹海靈便銷聲匿跡，直到1963年才復出！

31. 1963/12/21（香港公映）《剪月蓉》，導演高立，尹為編劇

### 尹海靈電影重見天日

2013年1月1日，尹海靈的消失似乎已無可挽回，令人惆悵。

但她在新加坡的先驅地位，早有定評，這一點令我們對她的專業生涯和私人生活所得的印象，不是一幅容貌拼圖，而是立體地顯現了她全心全意拍電影的形像。

2013年11月，北京的中國電影資料館，終於給香港電影資料館提供了一張影碟參考資料，是她在新加坡唯一自編自導的故事片《海外征魂》（片目第29部），而女主角（無獨有偶？）竟然叫做候玉。

該片於1946年11月30日記12月1日，先後兩晚在新加坡大華戲院作午夜場試映，12月5日才正式首映。

## 女電影人的先驅

香港國際電影節早前首映的紀錄長片《金門銀光夢》<sup>18</sup>（2013），為本文埋下伏筆。該片講述伍錦霞（1914-70）的事跡，她是最早為人所知的女導演，執導過多部粵語片。另



外，多虧曾奕田編導的紀錄片《荷里活華人》（2007），我們找到首部由女性執導、採用演員的華語劇情片《關武帝》（1916-17），導演是Marion Wong（1895-1969）。<sup>19</sup> 現在又突然冒出一個尹海靈，令華語片的早期華裔女性電影人一時間連中三元。

實在很難相信，1947年之後，這樣一位充滿自信的人物，竟然從此退出影圈，不再拍片。

如此神秘，尹海靈……你到底是誰？<sup>20</sup> [翻譯：徐昌明、杜蘊思]

**法蘭賓**，澳洲籍演員、編劇及監製，1990年開始從事香港電影歷史研究，與羅卡合著《香港電影跨文化觀》（2004），亦花了多年時間研究伍錦霞及尹海靈的生平與電影事業。有關伍錦霞的研究，見〈尋找伍錦霞——被遺忘的先驅〉（《電影藝術》總第309期，北京，電影藝術雜誌社，2006年）等文章。

特別鳴謝以下機構及人士提供意見及資料：

大英圖書館；香港大學圖書館；香港電影資料館；香港電影編劇家協會；香港戲院商會；紐約州資料館；蒙納士大學圖書館；澳洲國家圖書館；澳洲電影學院研究資料藏品；維多利亞州立圖書館；墨爾本大學拜利奧圖書館；林曉凰；曾憲冠；傅慧儀；楊碧霞；魏時煜；羅卡；Timothy Barnard；Kathy Fung；Annabel Gallop；Anne Kerlan；Lim Li-kok；Joe McAllister；Terry O'Toole；Di Pin Ouyang；Alvin Tam；Ian Ward；David Wells；Irene Wong；Frances Wood；Yap Soo Ei；Zaedi Zolkafli。

原載《通訊》第65期，香港電影資料館，2013年8月，並根據《Directory of World Cinema: CHINA, Volume 2》內，筆者撰寫的〈Wan Hoi-ling – early Chinese woman director, active 1937 - 1963〉一文加以補充。鳴謝Gary Bettinson 允許使用該文章。



## 註釋

1. 韋基柯林斯的《白衣女郎》啟發了好些二十世紀黑色小說，如維拉卡斯帕里的《蘿拉》，並創造出多重視點「案例式」敘事方法，就像黑澤明巨片《羅生門》（1950）所用的講故事手法。
2. 感謝香港戲院商會提供《尹海靈與尹海清資料》。尹海清和尹海靈一樣，也是香港編導。
3. 陳正茂：《逝去的虹影：現代人物述評》，台北，秀威資訊科技股份有限公司，2011。
4. 侯曜著有《影戲劇本作法》，上海，泰東圖書局，1926；現藏於世上數間圖書館。
5. 這次著名「事變」，可在網上輕易找到資料。很多人認為這是第二次世界大戰的真正肇因。事變發生於1931年9月18日，駐守滿洲（當時東北三省合稱）的日本軍開始侵佔該區，趕走年輕統帥張學良。
6. 堅：〈關於侯曜〉，《沙漠之花》特刊，香港，香港文化事業社，1937，頁4；承蒙傅慧儀女士為我翻譯了特刊中的重要文章，不勝感激。
7. 很慚愧，我在《Hong Kong Cinema – A Cross-Cultural View》（Law Kar, Frank Bren & Sam Ho, Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2004, p 373）一書的人名索引中，誤把她當作男性，因為漏看了傅慧儀編：《香港影片大全（第三卷）（1950-1952）》（香港電影資料館，2000）頁7附註3。
8. 出生年份據網上中文百度百科（<http://baike.baidu.com>）。濮舜卿第一部正式擔當編劇的電影是侯曜執導的《愛神的玩偶》（1925）。
9. 尹海靈：〈《沙漠之花》誕生記〉，《沙漠之花》特刊，香港，香港文化事業社，1937，頁10。
10. 參見網上 <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/research/index.shtml>，「Film Scripts」一欄。
11. 片目（一）及（二），資料主要來自黃淑嫻編：《香港影片大全（第一卷）（1913-1941）》，香港電影資料館，1997。
12. 編號2由尹海靈當助理編劇的影片乃根據電影研究者／學者劉欽先生新近研究侯曜作品時的新發現，詳見本系列電子書卷二有關文章。
13. 新加坡《海峽時報》，1937年6月9日，頁12。

14. 侯曜與女演員黎莉莉同船到埗（可能尹海靈也有份），見新加坡《海峽時報》，1946年4月16日，頁11。
15. 承蒙英國圖書館委員會惠予本人1946年1月5日第六期整份複印本。參考英國圖書館BL書架號：Asia, Pacific & Africa Or.Mic.7727，該刊物的縮微膠卷日期，由1945年12月19日到1954年7月31日。
16. 《居安思危：大戰前後新馬史料彙編》第247頁。主編馮仲漢：新加坡中華總商會1999年8月中文第一版。新加坡亞太圖書有限公司2006年英文版。英譯者：Yuen Cheng Chi。
17. Jan Uhde & Yvonne Ng Uhde, *Latent Images: Film in Singapore*, 2nd edition, Singapore: Ridge Books, NUS Press, 2010, p 26。
18. 香港國際電影節於2013年4月1日首映本片，由魏時煜編導，羅卡與魏時煜聯合監製。
19. 曾奕田將Marion Wong的故事放在他的影片《荷里活華人》中，該片由Deep Focus製作，2007年贏得金馬獎最佳紀錄片獎。參考：<http://www.hollywoodchinese.com>。
20. 程季華等編著的《中國電影發展史》（第二卷，北京，中國電影出版社，1963，頁76）曾提及過尹海靈，卻將其姓氏誤寫作「伊」，亦無顯示其性別。

# Woman in White — the Unbelievable Wan Hoi-ling

— Frank Bren

## INTRODUCTION

Six months of exhuming the achievements of filmmaker Wan Hoi-ling occasionally suggested mysterious heroines from literature, notably Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860) and Vera Caspary's *Laura* (1943).<sup>1</sup>

Wan Hoi-ling was real and not meant for mystery but she is the most strangely forgotten figure in the history of Hong Kong cinema.

Almost alone, her filmographies below validate this essay as 'research'. Theatrical outlets named for her films are authentic while contemporary advertisements verify those she authored, often collaboratively throughout 1937-1947. Yet six months of research was insufficient to say where and when she died or was born. That search continues. She is worth the effort.

## Wan through the story of Hou Yao (1903?–1942?)

For a sense of Wan as a person, we must turn temporarily to legend.

Happily, the Hong Kong Theatres Association (HKTA) has allowed me to read its intriguing, unattributed document entitled *About Wan Hoi-ling & Wan Hoi-ching* [Hoi-ling's younger brother]. It makes these interesting points<sup>2</sup>: The Wan siblings 'remain unknown. *The China Cinema Encyclopaedia* does not even mention them.' Hoi-ling, with her 'distinctive personality and originality' is 'among the earliest Chinese female film directors'. Both siblings learned their craft from filmmaker Hou Yao 'during the First Generation of Chinese cinema'(!) Citing the book, *Gone is the Rainbow: Commentary on Major Figures of the Modern Age*<sup>3</sup>, the document concludes that Hou's execution in Japanese-occupied Singapore was in 1945 when he was '46.' (Others challenge the age

and the timing but agree on Hou's martyrdom during 1942-1945).

As the document also suggests, the more we know about Hou, the more we will learn about Wan. Yet where's *his* definitive biography? Screen poet. Resistance fighter. Romantic. Lucky in love. Patriot. Murdered for 'anti-Japaneseness'. Even as a thinker, he is in rare company with theorist-filmmakers like Louis Delluc (1890–1924), Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893-1953) and François Truffaut (1932–84). Hou's 1926 book on filmmaking is still consulted today.<sup>4</sup>

For now, Wan's author contributions to Hong Kong cinema's first golden age (c. 1936–41), comprise our one major certainty about her. But she contributed a revealing essay to the brochure promoting Hou's "national defence" film, *The Desert Flower* (HK, 1937) adapted from his successful novel of that name. It marked Wan's cinema debut as an actress and accredited assistant scriptwriter/continuity supervisor.

As indicated in that essay, her film apprenticeship really began years earlier and she openly expresses admiration of Hou for his viewing cinema as enlightenment-through-entertainment, and - implicitly (his being the acknowledged "Henrik Ibsen" of Chinese drama) - his advocacy of gender equality (something once shared with Pu Shunqing – Hou's legal wife, see note 8): "I assisted Mr

Hou in his work over the last few years and was involved in scripting and continuity for *The Desert Flower* ... Around ten years ago, while Hou was still a film director for Lianhua Film Company, he had already drafted *Desert Flower*'s storyline but then abandoned movies altogether to join a resistance army..." highlighting his participation in the little-known "Volunteer Armies of Northeast China", China's sole resistance, guerrilla style, to Japan in the wake of the "Mukden Incident".<sup>5</sup> During the early-mid 1930s, she adds, Hou settled in Hong Kong to expand "*The Desert Flower* into a serialized novel published by *The Kung Sheung Evening News*." By 1937, she and others finally persuaded him to adapt and direct it as a film.

In the same brochure of 1937, friend 'Kin' describes him thus: 'Hou is from Panyu, Guangdong, aged 39. He studied at Dongwu University, is short-sighted and a scar and a mole occupy his very strange face with its high forehead and long hair. Unmistakably an artist!'<sup>6</sup>

*Hong Kong Filmography Vol I* (1913–1941), published by the Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA) in 1997, suggests why we ignored Wan for so long as the territory's first-known homegrown female film director. HKFA data records her films but scanty biographical information and the gender-neutral 'Hoi-ling' made many assume she was 'male'.<sup>7</sup>

Equally telling for her formation are two male collaborators in her most intensive directing years of 1939–1941: (1) Hung Chung-ho, grandfather of today's Sammo Hung, and (2) Hou Yao, her mentor, most frequent collaborator and ultimately lover.

Two women respectively symbolise Hou's 'silent' and 'sound' film careers. Firstly, in Mainland China, was Pu Shunqing (1902–?)<sup>8</sup>, a famous playwright, Hou's legal wife and his creative partner for both stage and screen. She is acknowledged today as Chinese cinema's first female screenwriter.

Then came Hou's 'talkies' made in Hong Kong and Singapore and, with them, his second great helpmate, Wan Hoi-ling, who had clearly (from her above-mentioned essay) embraced his values long before assisting him on the film, *The Desert Flower*.

As Wan further noted, 'Mr Hou's service as director is neither for profit nor fame. He wishes to create a National Defence film unifying people in a common preparedness to face foreign aggression. His intention is admirable!'<sup>9</sup>

Hou may (*today*) be regarded as remarkably comparable to the fictional anti-Nazi hero, "Victor Laszlo" (actor Paul Henreid), in Michael Curtiz' classic film romance, *Casablanca* (US, 1942).

Tragically, as Hou's martyrdom would show, such qualities targeted him for assassination by agents of Japan, probably also in Hong Kong, briefly the *Casablanca* of the Asian war.

### New York State Archives – Hunting Hong Kong film classics

Wan's and others' films of pre-1942 seem irrevocably lost. But the New York State Archives (NYSA) in Albany, New York, offers new insights into many of them for it boasts the world's largest collection of feature film scripts as originally lodged for NY state censorship from the 1920s to 1965.

NYSA is an open sesame for historians of Hong Kong cinema. One NYSA-held script, *The Rebel*, lodged for approval in 1939, credits Hong Kong's earliest-known woman producer, Tong Sing-to, as director. Yet the original, entitled *The Bomber Wen Shengcai* (Hong Kong release: 1 June 1937) credited Lam Tsong.

NYSA holds more than 2,400 'Hong Kong' screenplays, including some of them by Wan and Hou as indicated\* in the filmographies below.<sup>10</sup>

### Wan Filmography 1 – Hong Kong apprenticeship years<sup>11</sup>

1. 1937/5/20 (Hong Kong release) *The Desert Flower*. Assistant Scriptwriter & actor-singer for writer-director Hou Yao.



2. 1938/1/13 *The Ideal Fiancée*. Assistant Scriptwriter for writer-director Hou Yao.
3. \*1938/4/7 *Incident in the Pacific*. Assistant Director/Scriptwriter for writer-director Hou Yao.
4. \*1938/5/7 *The Woman Warrior*. Scriptwriter for director Ko Lei-hen.
5. 1938/6/15 *Fortress of Flesh and Blood* aka *Provoking Father*. Assistant Director for writer-director Hou Yao.
6. 1938/8/14 *The Second Marriage of Madam Chow* aka *Son vs Mother*. Scriptwriter for director Hou Yao.
7. \*1938/10/18 *The Wrong Couple*. Scriptwriter for director Hou Yao.
8. 1938/12/11 *Chamber of Powder and Rouge* aka *Hu Kui Sells Human Head*. Scriptwriter for co-directors Hung Chung-ho and Hou Yao.
9. 1939/1/26 *The Seductive Empress Now and Then*. Scriptwriter for director Hung Chung-ho.

Thus her HK apprenticeship through 1937-1939 comprised nine HK features<sup>12</sup>, five of them as solo screenwriter, including *The Seductive Empress Now and Then* (HK, 26 January, 1939) so oddly categorised as “contemporary/didactic” whereas its description as “a modern dress version” of the sexual mores of historical empress Wu Zetian (624-705) suggests levity plus time-shift experimentation with well-worn Tang Dynasty history. Henceforth, there is no reason to

think she would ever return to being an “assistant”. She was ready to direct.

Filmography 2 – Hong Kong co-director/co-writer 1939–40

10. 1939/3/16 (Hong Kong release) *The Ugly Empress* with Hou Yao.
11. 1939/4/23 *Judge Bao vs the Eunuch* with Hung Chung-ho.
12. 1939/4/25 *Master Keung aka Master Jiang* with Hou Yao.
13. 1939/5/25 *Suicide of an Empress* with Hung Chung-ho.
14. \*1939/7/3 *A Poor Man’s Deliverance* with Hung Chung-ho.
15. \*1939/7/12 *Incident in the Turtle Mountain* with Hou Yao.
16. \*1939/8/12 *The Filial Son and the Unworthy Mother* with Hou Yao.
17. 1939/12/1 *Daughter vs Stepmother* with Hou Yao.
18. 1939/12/24 *The Beautiful Woman Warrior* with Hung Chung-ho.
19. 1940/1/1 *The Chinese Tarzan* with Hou Yao.
20. 1940/2/28 *Mayhem on the Spring Lantern Festival* with Hung Chung-ho.

First solo film (Hong Kong) as writer-director

21. 1940/4/10 *The Goddess*.

(List continued with films 22 – 31 below)

In 1937, Singapore-based Shaw Brothers Limited had announced it would produce Malay-language features for the regional market.<sup>13</sup> In 1940, they thus engaged Hou and Wan, proven directors with the Shaws' other studios in Hong Kong, with Hou himself announced as arriving in Singapore aboard the Lloyd Triestino ship, *Conte Verde*, on April 15, 1940.<sup>14</sup> Openly advertised as the 'first' of these Malay-language films was *Mutiara* aka *Pearl* (below) and so far as is known, Hou and Wan co-wrote and co-directed all seven films numbered 23 to 29 below:

Filmography 3: Singapore 1940–41 (Malay-language)

22. 1940/7/23 (Singapore normal release, non-preview) *Mutiara* (*Pearl*).
  23. 1940/11/26 (premiere) 1940/12/3 *Bermadu* (*Polygamy*).
  24. 1940/11/26 (premiere); 1941/4/9 *Toping Shaitan* (*The Devil's Mask*).
  25. 1941/7/1 *Hanchor Hati* (*Heartbreak*).
  26. 1941/9/27 *Ibu Tiri* (*Stepmother*).
  27. 1941/10/21 *Terang Bulan di Malaya* (*Full Moon over Malaya*).
- (Continued with films 28 – 31 below).

On 7 December 1941 (US time), Japan infamously ignited the Pacific War by bombing the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. On December 8 (Singapore time) Japanese bombs rained

on Singapore, a harbinger of the much worse to come.... On 15 February 1942, Japanese officers accepted formal surrender of the territory by its British guardians. Wan and Hou were trapped ...

### Post War Catharsis

Exactly three and a half years later, on 15 August 1945, Japan itself lay down its arms.

Barely four months on, 19 December 1945 saw the launch of Singapore's new entertainment periodical, the Chinese-language *Yu le* aka *The Amusement*. Five issues further on (#6 of 5 January 1946) saw its "Silver Screen" columnist re-discover the erstwhile woman director of Malay-language films in Singapore during 1940-1941, the woman who had remained in the territory where, like so many Chinese, she endured its long occupation under Japan's military invaders. The same creatures who had slain her unarmed, beloved Hou Yao on a date, to our shame, still unconfirmed.<sup>15</sup>

"Southern Chinese woman filmmaker, Ms Wan Hoi-ling", said the columnist, had survived the occupation by opening "a coffee shop in the Great World Amusement Park. She was simultaneously her own boss and sole employee!" Against an ongoing background of British officials resuming the territory's pre-war administration, public curiosity turned to Wan, one of the region's proven pioneering

filmmakers, man or woman.

Yet there she was rejecting overtures from “a certain [local] film company” whose identity (China Film Studio? The Shaw brothers?) remains a mystery. The report describes her as “brightly dressed” and always in an upbeat mood. So why was she running a shop and not making films? What made her so happy? Answer: she had a disciple:

“My goal is to teach singing and dancing skills as well as acting and performing techniques,” she confessed. “Since my goal is achieved, of course I am happy! I have just one student, Ms. Lam Wan-ling, a smart lady, 21, and a very talented singer of Cantonese opera. Given time, she could make a great contribution to the film industry here.” Wan additionally mentored Ms Lam in film theory for two hours weekly and in “love matching”(!?) – perhaps a professional distancing technique during torrid love-making scenes with male stars? Wan also taught cinema theory and practice.

Besides, Wan revealed, she herself was no mere director-for-hire: “The time is not ripe to direct again and I am not the kind to make films for a big company.” From her reply, said the columnist, “it is clear that she does not intend to change her career entirely. Given the right opportunity, she will still be ready to return to the film arena.”

She was soon given that opportunity. Wan inexorably moved once more into the film arena as early as August 1946.

As the late Foong Choon-hon wrote in his remarkable book (as editor), *Eternal Vigilance – the Price of Freedom*,<sup>16</sup> Singapore delivered an essential post-war catharsis for the events of 1942-45 through its cinema, especially early on through three ‘fiction’ films all produced by “China Film Studio” in 1946/1947.

The first-known of those films was *Blood and Tears of the Overseas Chinese / Huaqiao Xuelei* (dir. Cai Wenjin, Singapore, 1946) produced by China Film Studio’s Miu Hong-nee and Lin Zhensheng. It previewed at Singapore’s Alhambra theatre from late July 1946 before officially opening at the Garrick on September 12. The same producers’ next two films would be written and directed by Wan Hoi-ling (films 29 and 30 below).

#### Filmography 3 (continued):

28. 1946/11/29 (Sarawak release): *Tiga Kekaseh (Three Lovers)*, Lilian Theatre, so advertised in the Sarawak Tribune.

Filmography 4: as solo writer/director (Chinese-language) in Singapore,  
produced by Miu Hong-nee and / or Lin Zhensheng

29. 1946/12/5 (Singapore release) *Spirit of Overseas Chinese* as

advertised.

30. 1947/10/8 *Honour and Sin* aka *Miss Nanyang*.

The above two films were screened in Singapore's Majestic Theatre.

As Foong noted in *Eternal Vigilance – The Price of Freedom* (page 247), such “local movies on anti-Japanese warfare in Malaya” included the above-mentioned three by Chinese Film Studio (two of those by Wan Hoi-ling). “These movies were sponsored locally, and planned and directed by Chinese movie talent such as Wu Cun and Yin Hai-ling.”<sup>17</sup> The movies’ themes centred on the sufferings of the Malayan Chinese under the tyrannical rule of the Japanese military and the heroic deeds of the people against injustice.” Foong added that the films were “crudely made” (due to the old film equipment “left behind by the Japanese military”) but their contents “were rigorously researched.”

Her final two Singapore films as a solo writer-director (1946-1947) undoubtedly responded to the loss of a loved one (Hou) and to the horrors of a surviving a Japanese-occupied Singapore (1942-45). They were possibly the coldest, loneliest film works of her life, the last, it is said, being a rare onscreen drama about wartime comfort women.<sup>18</sup>

Wan Hoi-ling then vanishes from the current historical record - until 1963!

Last-known film:

31. 1963/12/21 (HK release) Love Torn, Scriptwriter for director Kao Li.

A “Wan Hoi-ling film” recovery.

On 1 January 2013, this filmmaker’s disappearance seemed depressingly complete.

Yet her self-evident pioneer status in Singapore comes to our rescue in forming better than identikit impressions of her professional and personal lives as a rounded, dedicated filmmaker.

In November 2013, Beijing’s China Film Archive supplied the HKFA with – at last! - a reference disc copy of her first solo Singapore feature, *Spirit of the Overseas Chinese* - Film 29 - whose leading performer was named (coincidentally?) Hou Yu.

Following its two midnight previews on November 30 and December 1, 1946, in Singapore’s Dahua or Majestic Theatre, *Spirit* formally premiered there on 5 December, 1946.

The Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF)



foreshadowed this essay last year by premiering *Golden Gate, Silver Light* (HK, 2013), since renamed as *Golden Gate Girls* - a feature-length documentary on Esther Eng (1914-1970), the world's first-known woman to direct multiple Chinese features.<sup>19</sup> Thanks to another film documentary, *Hollywood Chinese* (US, 2007), by writer-director Arthur Dong, we have Marion Wong (1895-1969) as the first known woman to direct any serious Chinese feature using actors, namely *The Curse of Quon Gwon* (US, 1916-17).<sup>20</sup> Wan's sudden reappearance thus completes a fresh Chinese hat-trick of early women film firsts.

It beggars belief that, after 1947, such an assured personality would never make another movie.

Yet ... who are you, Wan Hoi-ling?<sup>21</sup>

Frank Bren, is an Australian actor, playwright and producer who has undertaken serious research work on Hong Kong cinema history since the 1990s. He co-wrote *Hong Kong Cinema - A Cross-Cultural View* together with Law Kar and Sam Ho for Scarecrow Press (US, 2004). He also spent years researching the life and film career of Esther Eng as documented in 'Blind Spot: Looking for Esther Eng' (*FilmArt*, no 309, Beijing, April, 2006) and elsewhere. His research on Wan Hoi-ling, early Chinese woman filmmaker, is equally long-term.

Special thanks for feedback/information/clues/interest: AFI Research Collection; Baillieu Library; British Library Board; Hong Kong Film Archive; Hong Kong Film Directors Guild; Hong Kong Theatres Association; Hong Kong University Library; Monash University Library; National Library of Australia; New York State Archives;

State Library of Victoria; Timothy Barnard; Winnie Fu; Kathy Fung; Annabel Gallop; Anne Kerlan; Law Kar; Lim Li-kok; Joe McAllister; Terry O'Toole; Di Pin Ouyang; Alvin Tam; Tsang Hin-koon; Ian Ward; Louisa Wei; David Wells; Irene Wong; Frances Wood; Yap Soo Ei; Yeung Bick-har; Zaedi ZolKafli.

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## Notes

1. Collins' *The Woman in White* inspired some 20th-century noir fiction including Caspary's Laura, and sired the multi-viewpoint form of storytelling associated with Kurosawa Akira's great film, *Rashomon* (1950).
2. About Wan Hoi-ling & Wan Hoi-ching (in Chinese). Thanks to HKTA for this access. Wan Hoi-ching was also a Hong Kong writer-director.
3. Chen Cheng-mao, *Gone is the Rainbow: Commentary on Major Figures of the Modern Age*, Taipei: Showwe Information Co Ltd, 2011, p. x (in Chinese).
4. The book is *On Writing Photo-plays*, by Hou Yao (Shanghai: Taidong Press, 1926, in Chinese). Now available in several world libraries.
5. This famous 'incident', easily researched online, defines for many the real beginning of World War 2. It occurred on September 18, 1931, when Japanese forces stationed in Manchuria (China's three North-eastern provinces collectively so known) began annexing that territory, deposing Manchuria's young ruler Chang Hsueh-liang ("The Young Marshal").
6. Kin, 'On Hou Yao', *The Desert Flower* catalogue, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Culture Press, 1937, p 4 (in Chinese). My profound thanks to Winnie Fu who translated vital essays from this catalogue.
7. Shamefully, I classified both her and Pu Shungqing as 'm' (male), in a Names index for *Hong Kong Cinema – A Cross-Cultural View* by Law Kar, Frank Bren & Sam Ho (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2004, p 373), overlooking note 3, p.7 of *Hong Kong Filmography Vol III (1950–1952)* (Winnie Fu [ed], Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2000.)
8. Birth year according to Baidu, the online Chinese encyclopaedia ( <http://baike.baidu.com>). Pu's first major screenwriting credit was for *Cupid's Puppets* (1925) directed by Hou Yao.
9. Wan Hoi-ling, 'The Birth of The Desert Flower', *The Desert Flower* catalogue, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Culture Press, 1937, p.10 (in Chinese).
10. Refer to 'Film Scripts' online at <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/research/index.shtml>.
11. Filmographies 1 and 2 are principally sourced from Mary Wong (ed), *Hong Kong Filmography Vol I (1913–1941)*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 1997.

12. Film 2 of Wan Hoi-Ling's apprenticeship list was added on by researche-scholar Lau Yam, following his research on director Hou Yao. (refer to Book 2 of this E-Book series for his compilation of Hou Yao's films)
13. See p.12, *The Straits Times*, Singapore, 9 June 1937.
14. Hou's arrival, with actress Li Lili (and presumably Wan too), was announced in *The Straits Times* on 16 April, 1946, p.11.
15. Thanks to the British Library Board for sending me an entire copy of this 5 January 1946 issue. Refer BL's shelfmark: Asia, Pacific & Africa.Or.Mic.7727 with the publication's microfilm date range listed as 19 December 1945 to 31 July 1954. Identifier: System number 009317066.
16. See p.247 of *Eternal Vigilance – the Price of Freedom*, ed. Foong Choon Hon, English translation by Yuen Cheng Chin, Asiapac Books Pte Ltd, Singapore, 2006; from 1st Chinese edition: 居安思危, ed. Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Singapore, 1999.
17. "Yin Hai Ling" is the Mandarin pronunciation for Wan Hoi-ling's Chinese character name, 尹海靈.
18. See Jan Uhde & Yvonne Ng Uhde, *Latent Images: Film in Singapore*, 2nd edition, Singapore: Ridge Books, NUS Press, 2010, p.26.
19. HKIFF premiered this film by writer-director Louisa Wei on 1 & 2 April, 2013. It was co-produced by Law Kar and Louisa Wei.
20. Arthur included her story in his film, *Hollywood Chinese* (US, 2007), for Deep Focus Productions. It won the Golden Horse Award for Best Documentary in 2007. See [www.hollywoodchinese.com](http://www.hollywoodchinese.com).
21. Wan (尹) is mentioned once (gender-neutral) as (伊海灵) - 灵 being the simplified form of 靈 – on p.76, Vol. 2, of *Developmental History of Chinese Cinema*, Cheng Jihua et al (eds.), Beijing: China Film Press, 1963 (in Chinese). To English ears, 伊 is pronounced "yi" in both Mandarin and Cantonese.

# 《關武帝》 美國華裔電影先鋒作 (節譯)

—— 余競存

《關武帝》於1916年拍成，是目前所知最早一部由美國華裔拍攝的劇情片。一位年芳21的美籍華人女性Marion Wong（我的姑婆）構思拍攝本片。<sup>1</sup>她在1895年1月2日誕生於美國舊金山唐人街家中。是她一手促成《關武帝》的製作，除了撰寫劇本，她還任執行製片、尋找贊助人、聯合製作、親自導演，甚至飾演了女主角。

這部黑白默片儘管以華人及美國華裔生活為題材，卻是為美國主流觀眾而拍的。影片的解說字幕已然失佚，故事發展不是十分清晰，但橋段大致能理解。紐約發行的《電影世界》曾訪問Marion。據1917年7月17日出版的一期報導：<sup>2</sup>

「《關武帝》是說中國人因為受了西方文化影響，而受到中國的神明關帝詛咒。首段故事在加州發生，描寫當地華人有為中國君主政權奔走，也有為革命共和出力，大家各展奇謀，明爭暗鬥。

有段愛情也從中展開，直到最後……。」

《關武帝》很可能在至少北加州三個地區取景：一，Marion父母的奧克蘭家中後院；二，Marion姐姐Alice Wong Lim的奧克蘭家中；三，舊金山灣區的費利蒙和米爾皮塔斯的戶外地點。影片竣工不久，Marion初剪了一個版本，給親友欣賞。1917年又辦了一場較大的放映，邀請了更多賓客。<sup>3</sup>同年7月，Marion和母親Chin See（片中飾演女主角的家婆）攜片到紐約市，向全國各地發行商宣傳。雖然努力推廣，有興趣作商業發行的人不多，令Marion覺得這是部失敗之作。

但今天，Chin See和Marion母女的後人，卻因這齣傑作而沾光。他們認為《關武帝》不但是部出色作品，更遠遠走在時代前端。

2007年3月24日，《關武帝》在加州奧克蘭參加國際美國亞裔電影展，作世界首映，五天後在荷里活首映，那是美國影藝學院的節目「失而復得：近日發掘的電影遺珠」，在荷里活的伍德鄧恩戲院放映。<sup>4</sup>

## 家族珍藏

1968年6月，一個周末下午，時近黃昏，我外祖母Violet Wong（片中女主角）帶我到她家的地下室。她家房子在加州柏克萊，是與我外祖父Albert Wong（Marion哥哥）所擁有。外祖母指着陰暗封塵的角落，那兒有個大鐵罐，放在一扇窗戶和一個舊鏡旁邊。她口氣堅定的對我說：「這盒子裏面有部老電影，你快去想想辦法。」我聽從外祖母吩咐，把鐵罐拿走，裏面裝了三卷快霉掉的35毫米菲林。我把菲林拿到柏克萊市中心的Palmer's攝影店。該店員工法蘭克（Frank Smith）是我同學，他把35毫米菲林轉為當時最合適的16毫米格式。法蘭克說他只能挽救其中的35分鐘，大概是全片的一半。外祖母Violet把修復的16毫米菲林一直保管了五年，然後1973年在位於加州路住宅的聖誕晚會上，才放映給上上下下四代人看。她的孫兒女和曾孫兒女，對這件家族珍藏所知甚少。我們很高興看到已屆78高齡的老祖母當年20歲的演出。她美麗迷人、可愛清純、表情豐富、溫婉優雅。我想外祖母本人也很高興看到自己青春貌美的時刻，而親朋戚友的讚賞和看得樂滋滋的樣子，也會令她也充滿喜悅。

可惜，在這次家庭放映，連我自己在內，沒有人問清楚外祖母這部片講的是甚麼，Marion的拍片計劃最後又怎麼樣了。那個聖誕晚會的電影放映，是外祖母Violet一手安排的，

圖一 Marion Wong (左) 與 Violet Wong (右)  
經常於西式飯店跳舞，裝扮成中國公主。攝於  
1916年加州奧克蘭。

Fig 1 Marion Wong (left) and Violet Wong (right),  
Oakland, California, 1916. Marion and Violet  
frequently danced at western hotels pretending to  
be Chinese princesses.



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Marion和哥哥Albert已於約五年前，即1969年先後去世。那次活動之後，16毫米的拷貝仍舊儲存於外祖母家，直至她1981年過身為止。

祖母辭世後三十多年，這個16毫米拷貝在家族眾人中輾轉流傳。影片並沒有如外界人士所以為的佚失無考。當外祖母Violet把菲林給我時，我感覺到她要把一份家族珍藏交給我看管。

影片的原本拷貝，很可能至少有五份。一份屬於外祖母Violet和外祖父Albert，也就是被轉成16毫米格式的那份原本。第二份在Marion父母（Chin See 和 Jim Sing）手上；第三份



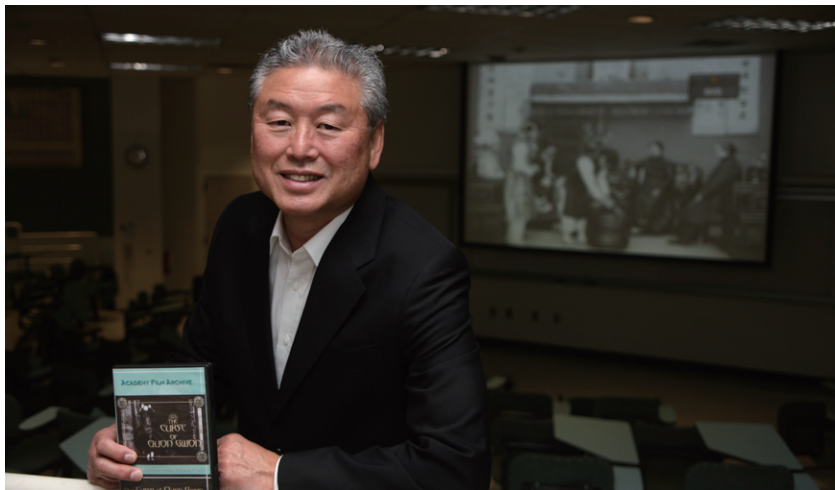


圖二（左至右）Carolyn Yee、Marcella Wong Yasuhiro、余競存教授、Mai-Lon Gittelsohn、Gala Irma Wong，攝於加州州立大學，2012年10月。

Fig 2 (from left to right) Carolyn Yee, Marcella Wong Yasuhiro, Gregory Mark, Mai-Lon Gittelsohn, Gala Irma Wong, Davis, California State University, October 2012.

在Marion大姊的Lim家；第四份在二姊Ah-Tye家。而很可能在1980年代，Marion的兒子Henry Hong把家中所藏的第五份35毫米拷貝，交給表姊Stella Wong Lee 保管。1991年，我替加州大學柏克萊美國亞裔研究圖書館安排，向Stella Wong Lee 購買了她丈夫Kem Lee的攝影作品（Kem Lee已於1986年離世）。這個作品就放在Stella Wong Lee柏克萊住宅的兩個房間內。

Kem Lee 是舊金山唐人街著名攝影師，他從1927年開始，終其一生在記錄唐人街的生活變遷。他的攝影作品共有逾20萬張負片、照片和其他藝術品。而無意中連同他的照片一起購入的一件藝術品，就是《關武帝》35毫米拷貝，這拷貝原由Henry家族收藏，後來交給了Wong 氏家族的人保管。



圖三 本文作者余競存教授，攝於加州州立大學，2012年10月。

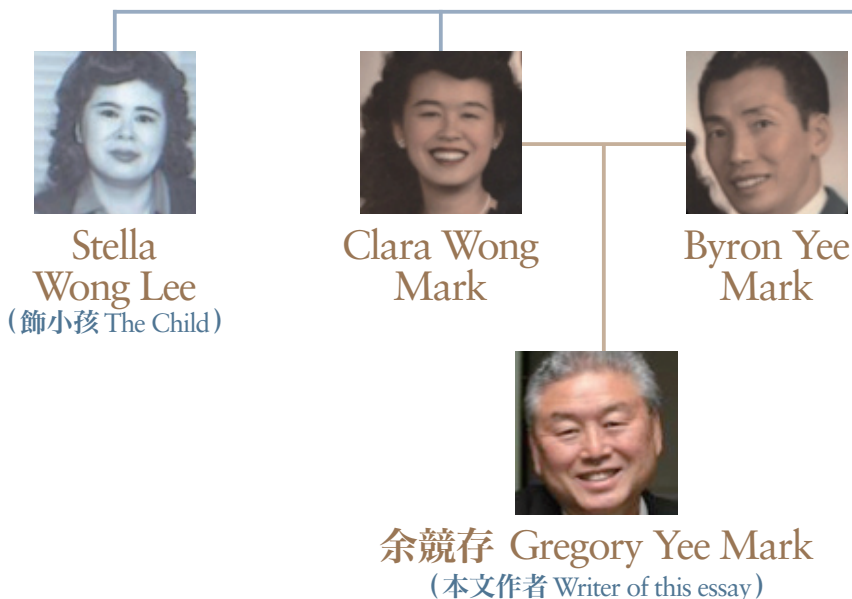
Fig 3 Gregory Mark, California State University, October 2012.

2004年，16毫米和35毫米的拷貝，由外祖母Violet的三個女兒Gala Irma Wong Davis、Marcella Wong Yasuhiro和 Mai-Lon Wong Gittelsohn，捐贈給美國影藝學院。她們和黃氏家族的人先聯絡設於舊金山的美國華人歷史學會（CHSA），學會主席則轉而聯繫華裔導演曾奕田，是曾氏大力遊說美國影藝學院修復了這兩份拷貝。

2004年，美國影藝學院把16毫米和35毫米菲林融合起來，修復了數碼DVD版本。2006年，《關武帝》榮幸受美國國會圖書館垂青，將之列入其美國國家電影目錄，作為美國珍藏的電影作品之一。其所以有此殊榮，是因為這是破天荒第一部美國華裔電影。此舉不但令這部劃時代之作成了真正的美國歷史文化寶藏，也通過國會圖書館保證了《關武帝》得以妥善保存，給後世欣賞。

# 黃氏家族成員

## Wong Family Tree

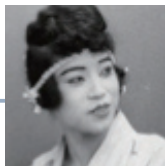




Chin See  
(飾家婆 The Mother-in-Law)



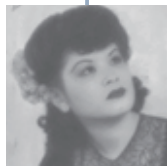
Jim Sing Wong



Violet Wong  
(飾新娘 The Bride)



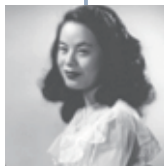
Marion Wong  
(飾女歹角 The Villainess)



Gala Wong  
Davis



Marcella Wong  
Yasuhiro



Mai-Lon Wong  
Gittelsohn



Albert  
Wong, Jr.

## Marion Wong：首位美國華裔女導演

想到要在美國破天荒拍一部獨立電影的，是一位美國第三代年輕華人女性。1916年，Marion在奧克蘭一份報章上，談及自己的拍攝動機：

「我從沒看過一部華語片……於是決定自拍一部，好介紹給世人。我先寫了個愛情故事。然後我覺得對我的民族及國家有興趣的人，也會想在片中看到中國的習俗及禮儀。所以我就在愛情戲上加了很多場次，來描寫這些事物。我真的希望影片會受到歡迎。」<sup>5</sup>

Marion寫劇本，是想表現她所認為的「美國華人問題」，即一個美籍華人如何融入傳統的中國社會。表面上，《關武帝》是發生於中國和美國的愛情故事。但在另一層次看來，影片的意義，在如實呈現美國華人的面貌，由地道的美籍華人來扮演，而非找歐洲人或美籍歐洲人來化妝，扮成中國人和美國華人的「樣子」，模仿他們的「舉止」。《電影世界》報1917年7月17日一期說得很清楚：「所有角色都是由華人演員扮演。」<sup>6</sup>

影片製作時，亞裔美國女性不多，<sup>7</sup> 加上她們在家庭的傳統角色，還有美國電影業仍羽翼未豐，Marion拍《關武帝》能

圖四 Marion Wong (左) 與 Violet Wong (右)，攝於1916年加州奧克蘭家。

Fig 4 Marion Wong (left) and Violet Wong (right) in front of family home in Oakland, California, 1916.



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有此成就，實在難能可貴。Marion克服了美國對種族、少數族裔及性別上的偏見，確是個富有遠見的人，不愧為國際電影界的先驅人物。

Marion的母親Chin See是在美國出生的華人，1870年生於舊金山唐人街。片中Chin See飾演新娘的家婆，當年她46歲。Marion父親叫Jim Sing，1844年生於廣東省，很可能於1869年移民舊金山。1885年Marion父母在舊金山結婚，當時母親15歲，父親40歲。生下六個孩子：三男三女，Marion是幺女。Albert（Albert Wong），我的外祖父，家中排行第四。

1911年8月，16歲的Marion，同哥哥Albert和雙親一起坐船去香港。此行其中兩個理由，一是安排Marion與一位香港銀行



圖五 Marion Wong, 《關武帝》, 1916。  
Fig 5 Marion Wong, *The Curse of Quon Gwon*, 1916.



圖六 Violet Wong, 《關武帝》, 1916。  
Fig 6 Violet Wong, *The Curse of Quon Gwon*, 1916.

家相親，二是替Albert物色對象。Marion卻拒絕盲婚啞嫁，母親也很支持。到了香港，Albert和Violet初會之後，不久就定下婚約，1911年10月撮合成親了。

美國的排華法案（1882、1888、1892、1902年）禁止華裔勞工移民美國。那是美國首次立法針對某一特定族群，禁止其進入本國。即使Chin See、Marion和Albert兄妹，都是在美国出生的美國公民，美國政府卻利用排華法案，壓抑如黃氏家族的美國公民。1911年他們去香港旅行，卻受到自己政府歧視，美國移民官當他們是想非法入境的外國人對待。他們一家規定只能離開一年，若限期不歸，很有可能不許再回到美國。所以他們於1912年7月便返回舊金山。

他們此行赴港，抵埗時孫中山領導推翻滿清的革命，正如火如荼。每當我想到Marion的拍攝動機及故事情節，就很想知



道1911年的辛亥革命，如何影響這個只受過三年美國教育的16歲女孩？中國興起的民族思想、身為美國華人的自豪感，還有中美兩國女性角色的轉變，又如何塑造了她影片的故事發展？是甚麼促使她踏出這一步——在當年沒有其他華裔美國女性，甚至很少導演，嘗試過的一步？

Marion回到美國後，在加州奧克蘭家族開的咖啡廳Edvin's Café工作，當收銀員和女侍應。咖啡廳位於金融娛樂區中心旁，附近有門票五分錢的戲院和歐菲姆大劇院。

戲院林立的這一區，對Marion有何影響？從1915年4月起，當時最負盛名的笑匠差利·卓別靈，在奧克蘭和鄰近費利蒙的尼爾斯河谷拍片。卓別靈自導自演了七部電影，都是埃塞尼電影製片公司出品的，其他最叫好叫座的，是《流浪漢》。<sup>8</sup>

由於這是現存最早一部美國華裔電影，我奇怪那些拍攝器材是怎樣弄來的？是哪個攝影師拍出這樣高水準電影的？家族的人說差利和工作人員常到Edvin's Café。他們有支持Marion對電影的興趣嗎？有幫忙她獲取器材、尋得攝影師嗎？考慮到影片攝影精美，佈景臨近埃塞尼電影製片公司在尼爾斯的外景地，有些默片專家就認為《關武帝》的攝影師，可能來自埃塞尼公司。



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圖七 Violet Wong (左)、Albert Wong (中, Violet丈夫, Marion哥哥)、Marion Wong (右), 攝於1916年加州奧克蘭。

Fig 7 Violet Wong (left), Albert Wong (center, Violet's husband and Marion's older brother), Marion Wong (right), Oakland, California, 1916.

儘管在技術上很可能有非華裔的美國人助陣，拍攝《關武帝》的主力人馬，顯然是Marion和她的黃氏家族。

## 黃氏家族

另一問題是，這位美國華裔女性，怎樣可能想出這個大型計劃，而且還拍攝完成，須知這樣規模的計劃在1916年之前很多人連試也不會試。她面臨的困難有種族和性別歧視，拍片經驗不足，缺乏拍攝器材，自己也沒有資金開拍。

Marion的最大本錢，來自親朋戚友的幫助。她的大家族在拍攝《關武帝》時起了關鍵作用，如飾演角色、分擔服裝、幫忙髮型、製作佈景、搬動器材，甚至攜手監製。由於資金緊絀，很可能大部份或所有演員及製作人員，都是義務工作，或只有很少薪酬。到1915年，Marion和Violet不僅是妯娌，還是摯友。Marion甚至讓Violet扮演片中女主角新娘。弔詭的是，Violet扮演一個西化的美國華人角色，但現實的她原是生於中國，1912年才嫁到美國。Marion本人原是美國出生的華人，但片中卻飾演來自中國的女歹角。

Alice Lim（Marion姐姐）的丈夫Lim Ben，是影片的主要監製。他是奧克蘭唐人街的富有商賈，投資無數。為本片籌募資金，他功不可沒。Alice和Rose Ah-Tye（Marion其他姐姐）都是聯合監製，因為她們主要負責管理服裝、化妝和髮型。她們的母親Chin See也幫忙製作服裝，擔任髮型顧問。這部默片的髮型設計尤其重要：不但用以顯示眾多女性人物的家庭角色和社會角色，而且在一場重頭戲中，更象徵了西方文化和中國文化的衝突。這一場出現頗早，美籍華人新娘（Violet）一意保留額前的西式劉海，但女傭卻懇求她把頭髮弄得更像中國傳統的樣式。

Rose的長女Beulah，在一場戲中演小孩，惜該場戲現已關

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圖八 Marion Wong (左) 與 Violet Wong (右)，攝於1916年加州奧克蘭美麗湖。  
Fig 8 Marion Wong (left) and Violet Wong (right), Lake Merritt in Oakland, California, 1916.

失，但目前存留的一張劇照，可見到她穿着中國小孩的服裝，旁邊是她父親（Harvey飾演）和母親（Violet扮演）。

Jim Sing 和 Chin See 夫婦也擔任影片製片，因他們有出錢資助。Chin See 還在影片完成後幫忙推廣宣傳和發行事宜。Marion 兄長 Albert（我的外祖父），出資贊助，還演了人力車伕的小角色。

21歲的Harvey Soo-Hoo（1894年生）是世交好友，片中扮演了新郎。這重要角色是一名美籍華人，而他自己也是美籍華

人，只不過像Violet一樣，也是出生於中國。

## 結論

《關武帝》拍於1916年，市場對象是一般大眾，而非華人及美籍華人。Marion與父母成立了Mandarin電影公司，希望製作更主流的美國電影，專注探討身為美籍華人的體驗。1917年7月，Marion和母親跑去紐約，為影片推廣，但有興趣的非亞裔美國發行商寥寥可數，他們唯有返回加州。不過，《關武帝》在當日的重要電影業界報紙《電影世界》上曾報導過至少兩次。另外，該報對影片、對Marion及Mandarin電影公司，均有正面評價，足以證明Marion有意向「全國」電影界推出《關武帝》。可惜，黃氏家族及其支持者都認為這是部失敗之作，於是把所有拷貝存放在地下室和儲物室，達52年之久。

評定《關武帝》在美國華人歷史、女性史、美國電影史及美國亞裔電影史上的地位，是刻不容緩的事。迄今為止，這部重要作品多不見於這些歷史記載之中。須知Marion Wong 為主流觀眾拍的這部技術先進的劇情長片，是在荷里活電影工業出現以前。最後一點也很重要，就是去探討一個大家族及少數族裔社區（奧克蘭的美籍華人圈），如何協助這位年輕的美籍華

裔女性，創作出破天荒的一部美國華裔電影。

## 尾聲

《關武帝》之後的真實人生：

Chin See（飾演家婆）：我的曾外祖母Chin See對Marion大力支持。她有六個孩子，最親的就是Marion。她平時說粵語。唯一離開美國的一次，是1911-1912年去香港旅行。她於1921年12月逝世。不久，丈夫Jim Sing（77歲）也返回廣東省終老，卒於1927年。

Marion Wong（編劇、導演、製片、飾演女主角）：我的姑婆（外祖父的妹妹）Marion Wong，於1917年與Kim Hong結婚。接着Marion在加州經營了幾家餐館，在斯托克頓市的叫Duck Inn；在列治文市的叫Singapore Hut，有歌舞廳，Marion本人更以英語及意大利語唱歌娛賓。她於1969年2月4日謝世，享年74歲。我記得Marion姑婆整天衣着得體，常穿旗袍，外披貂皮大衣。她夫妻育有五女一兒。

Violet Wong（飾演女主角／新娘）和Albert Wong（扮演人力車伕）：他們一共育有五女一兒。影片拍竣數年後，即1919年，我的外祖父母Violet和Alber生下第二個女兒Clara May Wong Mark（我的母親）。然後外祖父母進了加州的食品工業

工作。1945年，他們的「Violet餐館」開業。

Stella Wong Lee（片末出現的小孩）：Stella Wong Lee於奧克蘭成長，是美國華人歷史學會（CHSA）的創辦會員。也是著名藝術家、詩人和作家，支持社會公義不遺餘力。〔翻譯：徐昌明〕

余競存是美國薩克拉門托加州州立大學民族學系教授。獲加州大學柏克萊分校犯罪學博士學位。專長研究領域有社會動員、青年幫派、預防青少年暴力、美國毒品法案和美國華人社區（尤其是夏威夷檀香山和加州奧克蘭）。余博士是美國華裔先驅電影《關武帝》導演Marion Wong的侄孫，也是片中女主角Violet Wong的外孫。

### 鳴謝

本文在我腦海裡醞釀多年，只因太忙，遲遲未能動筆。承蒙香港電影資料館玉成，囑本人趁《關武帝》在香港首映之際，寫一篇介紹。若非眾多人士襄助，本文將無法完成。

最先是我外祖母Violet Wong，讓我想到要妥善保存這部家庭傳承的美國亞裔電影珍品。她交託我「（為本片）想想辦法」，表現了對我這年輕外孫充滿信心。我的姨婆Marion Wong則為我展開了邁向電影製作新領域所需的視野、魄力和創意。

我的家人一直支持我，從我姐妹Carolyn Yee，到侄女Kacy Ogawa、侄兒Corey Wong、表兄弟Colin Loy Lee。還有我三個姨姨：Gala Irma Wong Davis、Marcella Wong Yasuhiro、Mai-Lon Gittelsohn，她們是外祖父母Violet和Albert Wong的女兒，不厭其煩地為我講述上一代的事蹟，令我更深入了解她們的長姊即我母親Clara May Wong Mark。感謝我的孩子Kellen Nainoa Yee Mark和Alexa Kealohi Yee Mark一直以來不斷支持，現在他們長大了，更助我修改文稿。最後是我妻子法治齊，她花了很多時間與我交談，提出很多改善建議，我致以深切感謝與愛。

註釋

1. 大多數出生日期及中文羅馬字拼音，來自加州太平洋區，美國國家檔案和記錄管理局轄下之區域檔案館，其內之移民及國籍處理檔案。  
移民入境調查案件卷宗，1884-1944  
檔案編號 11096/14285 - WONG Nui Hi (Marion)  
檔案編號 11096/14286 - CHIN Chew Lam  
檔案編號 11096/14286A - WONG Soon Tung  
檔案編號 11096/14287 - WONG So Show (Jim Sing)  
檔案編號 11096/14308 - WONG Chung Shee (Violet)  
檔案編號 40317/14-7 - WONG Loy Ark (Albert)  
美國華人回國證明案件卷宗 (9170)，1903-12  
檔案編號 9170/883 - CHIN Shee [sic]
2. 〈The Curse of Quon Qwon [sic] (Mandarin)〉，《The Moving Picture World》，1917年7月17日，頁148。
3. 除了1916年及1917年在當地放映外，1948年春天也在柏克萊前一年才重新開張的Elmwood Theater (1914-1941年原為Strand Theater) 放映。出席的有外祖母Violet為數約百名的親友及她所經營的「Violet餐館」的顧客。Gala Irma Wong Davis 和 Marcella Wong Yasuhiro 均記得與會者有美國華裔親友，也有白人朋友及顧客。
4. 美國影藝學院的節目名稱「失而復得：近日發掘的電影遺珠」，對《關武帝》一片而言，並不正確，因為如後文所示，該片從沒遺失過。
5. 〈First Chinese Film Drama Written and Portrayed By Girl [sic]〉，《Oakland Tribune》，1916年5月11日。

6. 同註2。
7. Chalsa Loo : 《CHINATOWN: Most Time, Hard Time》, 紐約: Prager Publishers , 1991, 頁47。
8. 1912年, 埃塞尼電影製片公司在加州尼爾斯鎮開設分公司。這家公司與其他片廠, 活躍於尼爾斯河谷一帶, 使之成為荷里活之前的美國電影首都。



# The Curse of Quon Gwon: Chinese American's Pioneering Film

— Gregory Yee Mark

*The Curse of Quon Gwon: When the Far East Mingles with the West* (“*The Curse of Quon Gwon*”) was completed in 1916 and is the earliest known Chinese American feature film directed by a woman. A 21-year-old Chinese American woman named Marion Evelyn Wong, aka Wong Nui Hi (my great aunt), conceived of the idea to make the film.<sup>1</sup> She was born in the United States on January 2, 1895 at her family home on 743 Pacific Street in San Francisco Chinatown. Marion was the driving force behind the creation of *The Curse of Quon Gwon*: she wrote the script, was the executive producer, found financial backers, co-produced, directed, and even acted as the villainess.

Despite its focus on Chinese and Chinese American themes, this black-and-white silent film was produced for mainstream American audiences. The intertitles are missing from the film and therefore the story line is not completely clear. However, the basic plot is

generally understood. Besides the surviving scenes of the film, there is information about the plot from both family lore and from one of the earliest and prominent publications of the burgeoning film industry, *The Moving Picture World* (*The World*). *The World*, based in New York, interviewed Marion. According to *The Moving Picture World*, July 17, 1917,<sup>2</sup>

“*The Curse of Quon Gwon* deals with the curse of a Chinese god that follows his people because of the influence of western civilization. The first part is taken in California, showing the intrigues of the Chinese who are living in this country in behalf [sic] of the Chinese monarchical government and those who are working for the revolutionists in favor of a Chinese republic.

A love story begins here and is carried through the rest of

the production...”

*The Curse of Quon Gwon* was probably shot in at least three Northern California locations: 1) in the backyard of Marion's parents residence at 517 16th Street, Oakland; 2) the Oakland home of Alice Wong Lim, Marion's eldest sister, at 511 16th Street; and 3) outdoor shots in Fremont and Milpitas. Shortly after the completion of the film, Marion had a soft rough cut showing for family and friends and a larger 1917 showing for invited guests.<sup>3</sup> This was followed by a July 1917 trip to New York City by Marion and her mother Chin See, aka Chin Chow Lon (who plays the heroine's mother-in-law), to market the film to regional and national distributors. Despite these efforts, there was little commercial interest in the film. Marion felt the film was a failure.

Today, the descendants of Marion Wong and Chin See are very proud of Marion's masterpiece and believe *The Curse of Quon Gwon* was a successful film and was way ahead of its time. Marion set the bar high for future filmmakers, both Asian American and non-Asian American whose movies had Asian and Asian American themes and actors. In this film, Marion strived to create authentic Asian American characters and accurate supporting details such as period dress and hairstyles. Per *The Moving Picture World*, “The scenery and the settings are particularly interesting and show some...strong dramatic sets...”<sup>4</sup>

For decades after the making of *The Curse of Quon Gwon*, Asian Americans were depicted in film in overwhelmingly negative, subordinate, and derogatory images such as the Evil Villain, the opium addict, or the Mysterious, Exotic “Oriental” Woman. It was not until the 1980s that American cinema would even come close to catching up to the authentic, non-stereotypical portrayal of Asian Americans that Marion accomplished in her pioneering film some six decades earlier. In the 21st century, American media as a whole continues to perpetuate derogatory caricatures and stereotypes such as the “awkward Asian American male nerd” and the “China Doll” in American film and television.

On March 24, 2007, *The Curse of Quon Gwon* had its World Premiere in Oakland, California as part of the International Asian American Film Festival. *The Curse of Quon Gwon* had its Hollywood Premiere five days later, on March 29, 2007, at a program called “Lost and Found: Recent Discoveries,” presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (“the Academy”), at its Linwood Dunn Theater in Hollywood.<sup>5</sup> At the Academy’s premiere, 98-year-old Beulah Ah-Tye Jung (born March 25, 1909), the daughter of Marion’s older sister (Rose Ah-Tye), attended the event. Beulah was the film’s last known surviving actor and played a child in one of the key missing scene(s). She passed away three weeks after the Academy premiere.

## A Family Treasure

One late Saturday afternoon in June 1968, my grandmother, Violet Wong (the film's heroine), aka Jang Mon Foo, aka Wong Jung Shee, took me to the basement of her house that she owned with my grandfather, Albert Wong (Marion's older brother), at 2237 California Street in Berkeley, California. Violet – with great determination – pointed towards a corner of the dark dusty room, next to a window and an old wok, to a large canister. She said, “Gregory, there's an old film in this box – you go do something with it.” I obeyed my grandmother, and brought the old canister, which had three reels of disintegrating 35mm film inside it, to Palmers, a photography store on Shattuck Ave in downtown Berkeley. A school friend and Palmers employee, Frank Smith, transferred the 35mm film reels to the most accessible format for the period, 16mm film. Frank told me that he could only save 35 minutes of the film which represented approximately half the length of the original film. Violet kept the restored 16mm film for five years, and then at our extended family's 1973 Christmas Party at the California Street house, she showed *The Curse of Quon Gwon* to four generations of her family. Her grandchildren and great grandchildren knew little about this family treasure. We enjoyed seeing our 78-year-old family matriarch as a 20-year-old girl. She was stunningly beautiful, sweet, innocent, expressive, and graceful, all at the same time. For most of us, we really did not know what to say. Violet's young adult and teenage

grandsons teased her about that she was such a “babe” (beautiful) and that she was so “hot” (attractive). Reflecting back to her reaction, I think Violet enjoyed seeing herself as a beautiful young woman, and the positive, happy reactions of her extended family and friends. Even today, her oldest grandchild, Oakland resident Carolyn Mark Yee, vividly recalls her grandmother’s understated beauty, especially on the day of the 1973 family screening.

Unfortunately, at the family screening, no one, including myself, asked Violet what the film was about and what happened to Marion’s plans for the film. At this showing, Marion Wong’s husband Kim Hong was there. Although Kim was normally talkative, that night he did not say much. It was Violet’s Christmas/film screening party, and both Marion and Albert had passed away five years earlier in 1969. Afterwards, the 16mm print was stored in Violet’s house, until her death in 1981. Next it went to my garage, then to Stella Wong Lee’s home (Violet’s eldest child), who plays the child in the end of the film, then back to me, and finally to Mai-Lon Wong Gittelsohn (Violet’s youngest daughter).

After Violet’s passing, for the next 30 plus years, the 16mm film was passed from family member to family member. Contrary to popular belief, the film was never lost. When my grandmother gave me the film “to do something with it,” I sensed that she was

entrusting me to care for a family treasure, something special that was not just a failed family enterprise. In 2000, I asked one of my Asian American Studies colleagues at San Francisco State University, Lorraine Dong, who was then President of the Chinese Historical Society of America (CHSA) (located in San Francisco) if she could suggest where to safely house the film. She did not know where to store the film.

There were most likely at least five original copies of the film. One belonged to Violet and Albert, which was the one that was transferred into the 16mm format. The second went to Chin See and Jim Sing (Marion's parents), one to the Lim family (Marion's oldest sister), and the fourth to the Ah-Tye family (Marion's second oldest sister). Probably in the 1980s, Henry Hong (Marion's son) gave his family's (the fifth copy) 35mm print to his cousin Stella Wong Lee for safekeeping. In 1991, I arranged for the University of California, Berkeley Asian American Studies Library to purchase Kem Lee's photography collection from Kem's wife, Stella Wong Lee. This collection was stored in two rooms in Stella's house (1537 Comstock Court, Berkeley).

Kem Lee was the noted San Francisco Chinatown photographer who documented Chinatown community life from 1927 until his death in 1986. The Kem Lee collection contains over 200,000

negatives, photographs, and artifacts. One of the artifacts that was inadvertently acquired along with Kem Lee's photograph collection was Henry's family's 35mm copy of *The Curse of Quon Gwon*. This 35mm print was later given to one of the Wong family members for safekeeping.

In 2004, the 16mm print and the 35mm version were donated to the Academy by Violet's three daughters, Gala Irma Wong Davis, Marcella Wong Yasuhiro and Mai-Lon Wong Gittelsohn. It was Mai-Lon, Gala, Marcella and other Wong family members who contacted the CHSA, and in turn its President contacted filmmaker Arthur Dong. Arthur played a key role in facilitating and persuading the Academy to restore the 16mm and 35mm prints.

In 2004, the Academy merged the 16mm and 35mm films into the restored digitized DVD format. In 2006, *The Curse of Quon Gwon* had the distinct honor of being placed on the United States National Film Registry, the Library of Congress' list of the nation's most treasured films. *The Curse of Quon Gwon* was so recognized because of its status as the first known existing Chinese American film. This not only secured this pioneering film's role as a true American historical and cultural treasure but the Library was directed by Congress to ensure the film was preserved for future generations.



## Marion Evelyn Wong: The First Chinese American Woman Filmmaker

The idea to make this pioneering independent film was conceived by a young, third generation Chinese American woman. In a 1916 Oakland newspaper article, Marion talks about her motivation for creating the movie:

“I had never seen any Chinese movies...so I decided to introduce them to the world. I first wrote the love story. Then I decided that people who are interested in my people and my country would like to see some of the customs and manners of China. So I added to the love story drama many scenes depicting these things. I do hope it will be a success.”<sup>6</sup>

Marion Wong wrote the script to portray what she considered to be a “Chinese American issue,” the acculturation of a Chinese American into traditional Chinese society. On the surface, *The Curse of Quon Gwon* is a love story that took place in China and the United States. On another level, the film was significant for portraying Chinese Americans as real people played by actual Chinese American actors, and not by European or European American actors made up to “look” and “act” like Chinese and Chinese Americans. The July 17, 1917 issue of *The Moving Picture World* confirmed: “All the parts are played by Chinese artists.”<sup>7</sup>

The scarcity of Asian American women<sup>8</sup> at the time of its production, their family roles, and the fledgling American film industry made Marion's achievements and *The Curse of Quon Gwon* even more remarkable. Beyond the American challenges of race, ethnicity, and gender, Marion Wong was truly a visionary woman and pioneer in the international film community.

Marion Wong was born in San Francisco Chinatown. Her mother, Chin See, was herself an American-born Chinese. Chin See was born in 1870 in San Francisco Chinatown on 730 Jackson Street, a block away from where she gave birth to Marion. In the film, Chin See plays the Bride's mother-in-law; at the time of the film she was 46 years old. Marion's father was Jim Sing, aka Wong Shue Su, who was born in 1844 in the Hoi Ping District in the Guangdong Province. Most likely in 1869 (Tung Chee 8), he migrated to California. When they married in Lakebrook, California on December 1885, Chin See was 15 years old and Jim Sing was 40 years old. Together they had six children, three daughters and three sons, of which Marion, the sixth child, was the youngest. The fourth child was Albert Wong, aka Wong Loy Ark (my maternal grandfather).

On August 22, 1911, 16-year-old Marion, Albert and their parents set sail for Hong Kong. According to the 1910 United States Census there were 71,531 Chinese in the US and only 4,675 or 6.5%

were female.<sup>9</sup> Two of the reasons for the trip were to arrange a marriage for Marion with a Hong Kong banker and to find a wife for Albert. Marion rejected the attempt at an arranged marriage and was supported by Chin See. The family spent the whole time abroad in Hong Kong except for one week at Kay Sing Village (where Jim Sing was born) in the Hoi Ping District across the border in China. In Hong Kong, Violet remembered sitting down and knitting, and she glanced up and saw the strong hands of a man who walked by her.<sup>10</sup> The man was Albert, and shortly after this first meeting a marriage was arranged. On October 25, 1911, Albert and Violet were married in Hong Kong.

In the United States, the Chinese Exclusion Acts (1882, 1888, 1892, and 1902) prohibited Chinese laborers from immigrating to the US. These were the first US laws that targeted a specific ethnic group from entering the United States. However, even though Chin See, Marion, and Albert were born in the United States and therefore were US citizens, the US government used the Exclusion laws to target US citizens such as the Wongs. In their 1911 effort to travel to Hong Kong, their own government discriminated against them. The United State immigration inspectors treated them as if they were foreigners trying to enter the country illegally.

The Wong family was forced to depart for Hong Kong from

the Immigration Station located on Angel Island and not the San Francisco pier like other US citizens. Each Wong member had to individually undergo extensive interrogation. In addition, immigration officials required testimonies of character and testimonies validating the Wongs' US citizenships. Both Chinese American and European American relatives, friends, and business acquaintances were solicited. Testimonies from the European Americans were considered by the immigration authorities to be more trustworthy than those from their Chinese American counterparts. In an August 16, 1911 letter addressed to the inspector in charge, Chinese Division, Angel Island, California, Inspector P. B. Jones wrote, "There is also attached the statements of Mr. A. E. Graupner, assistant city attorney and his father, Mr. L.C. Graupner. These **two credible white witnesses** (emphasis added) stated that they have known Wong Lai (Sic) Ark and his alleged sister Wong Nui Hi since they were children." <sup>11</sup> There were no such references to credibility in the statements from Chinese American witnesses.

Also, the Wong family's trip was restricted to one year – if they did not return by then, there was the strong possibility that they would not be allowed to return to the United States. As a result, the family was gone for nearly one year – 11 months – and returned to San Francisco on July 15, 1912. This unfair biased treatment directed

towards the Wong family was symptomatic of the much larger issue of anti-Chinese sentiments and legislation in the United States.

During their trip to Hong Kong, they arrived during the midst of the Dr. Sun Yat-sen led revolution to overthrow the Ching Dynasty. When I think about Marion's motivation to do this film and the story line, I wonder how the 1911 Chinese revolution influenced this 16-year-old girl who had only three years of American education. How did China's rising nationalism, Chinese American pride, and the changing role of women in both China and the United States impact the storyline of her film? What had prompted her to take the step that no other female Chinese American or for that matter few filmmakers attempted?

After Marion came back to the United States, she went back to Oakland, California, and worked in the family's restaurant, Edwin's Café at 522 – ½ 16th Street as a cashier and waitress. The café was located next to the center of the Oakland financial and entertainment district. Nearby were nickelodeons and the Orpheum Theatre. In fact, a 1914 Orpheum Theatre guide displays an advertisement for Edwin's Café and Marion is posing in the photograph.<sup>12</sup>

What influence did the theatre district have upon Marion? From

February - April 1915, the most well-known actor/director of the time period, Charlie Chaplin, was filming movies in Oakland and the nearby Niles Valley in Fremont, California. During this period, Charlie Chaplin directed and acted in seven feature films produced by the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, Inc., of which the most successful was *The Tramp*.<sup>13</sup>

Given that this was the first known existing Chinese American film project, I wonder where the equipment came from and who was behind the camera to create such a high quality film. Who created scenes such as the necklace-changing one, which was cutting-edge for this era when the film industry was just beginning? Family folklore has it that Chaplin and members of his crew frequented Edwin's Café. This theatre district hang-out opened at 11am and closed at 2am; plus, it served alcohol. It's not hard to imagine the Niles Valley film production cast and crew, including Chaplin's team, frequenting Edwin's. Did they support Marion's interest in film and did they help secure the equipment and cameramen? Given the film's excellent cinematography and proximity of the set to the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, Inc.'s Niles location, some silent film experts have suggested that *The Curse of Quon Gwon's* cinematographer might have been from the Essanay company, perhaps even a member of Chaplin's crew.

Nevertheless, despite the strong possibility that non-Chinese

Americans could have assisted with the technology, the backbones of the making of *The Curse of Quon Gwon* were clearly Marion and the Wong family.

### The Wong Family

Another question that comes up is how this young Chinese American woman could plan and implement this ambitious film project that very few people had even attempted by 1916. She faced the challenges of racial and gender discrimination, little or no filmmaking experience, did not have the filmmaking equipment, and she personally did not have the financial resources to fund such a project.

A most important asset was that Marion had the support of her family and friends. Marion's extended family played significant roles in the making of *The Curse of Quon Gwon* such as acting, costumes, hair styling, set locations (in Oakland/San Francisco Bay Area), moving equipment, and even co-producing the film. Given the tight budget, most likely most or all the actors, and production staff, and crew worked for free or for a minimum fee. By 1915, Marion and Violet were not only sisters-in-law but the closest friends. They danced together, ate together, played mahjong together, and eventually celebrated family events together. Their friendship lasted

a lifetime. Marion even cast Violet as the main character in her film, the Bride. Ironically, Violet plays a westernized Chinese American character but in reality she was born in China and didn't arrive in the United States until 1912. Marion herself was an American-born Chinese, but in the film played the villainess from China.

The husband of Alice Lim (Marion's older sister), Lim Ben, was a key producer of the film. As a successful Oakland Chinatown merchant involved in numerous financial enterprises, Lim Ben played a crucial role in raising funds for the project. Alice and Rose Ah-Tye (Marion's other older sister) were co-producers in that they were the main ones in charge of the costumes, makeup and hairstyling. Their mom, Chin See, also helped with costume production and hairstyling consulting. The film's hairstyles were particularly important in this silent film: not only do they give clues to the family and social roles of the many women characters, but in one pivotal scene, they hold special significance in symbolizing the conflict between western and Chinese culture. In this early scene, the Chinese American bride (Violet) is determined to keep her western style bangs despite attempts from a maid to style her hair into a more traditional Chinese look.

Rose's eldest child, Beulah, plays a child in the now missing scenes of the film. There is evidence of the scenes in a surviving still



shot showing Beulah as a child in Chinese dress next to the husband (Harvey) and wife (Violet).

Jim Sing and Chin See co-produced the film as well in that they financially helped support the project, and Chin See assisted in the marketing, promotion, and distribution plans of the film once it was completed.

Marion's older brother Albert (my grandfather), contributed funds for the project and played a small part as a rickshaw runner. His daughter, Marcella Wong Yasuhiro (my aunt), remembers Albert playing this role in the 1948 35mm film showing at the Elmwood Theater.<sup>14</sup>

A 21-year-old Harvey Soo-Hoo (born October 14, 1894), a close family friend, plays the important role as the Groom. His character was Chinese American and Harvey himself was Chinese American, although, like Violet, he was born in China.

*The Curse of Quon Gwon* was created by a Chinese American woman; the cast were all Chinese Americans, and the funds were raised by Marion's family members.

Marion's vision that women can play key roles in film was in itself way ahead of its time. The majority of the cast were female

and played major roles in the film. Three generations of Wong family women played significant roles. The first generation was Chin See as the mother-in-law, and the second was represented by Marion and Violet. The third generation was the three-year-old Stella Wong Lee, who played the little girl dressed in western clothes who affectionally kisses her mother and father near the film's apparent conclusion.

## Conclusion

Made in 1916, *The Curse of Quon Gwon* was marketed for the general market and not specifically for the Chinese and Chinese American markets. Marion and her parents formed the Mandarin Film Company with the hopes of producing more mainstream American films focusing upon the Chinese American experience. In July 1917, Marion and Chin See went to New York City to market the film but they came back to California having received little interest from non-Asian American distributors. Yet *The Curse of Quon Gwon* was written up at least twice in the leading film industry trade paper of the day, *The Moving Picture World*. That fact alone is the most compelling evidence of Marion planning to launch *The Curse of Quon Gwon* onto the *national* moving picture scene. *The Moving Picture World* wrote positive comments about the film, Marion, and the Mandarin Film Company. Unfortunately, *The Curse of Quon Gwon* was deemed a failure by the Wong family and its backers, so all copies were stored in basements and closets for the

next 52 years.

In an era when most of us have learned that Asian Americans have always been portrayed in miserably stereotypic ways, defined by others, *The Curse of Quon Gwon* proves this concept wrong. By the film's very existence, it radically changes what has been known of Asian American film history. This first known existing Chinese American film was truly an Chinese American film. *The Curse of Quon Gwon* was written, produced, and directed by Chinese Americans and featured an all-Chinese American cast. Its 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Chinese American writer/director was completely in charge of developing and directing genuine Chinese and Chinese American characters with full character development. This was news in 1916. This same film would be news today.

It is important to assert *The Curse of Quon Gwon's* groundbreaking place in Asian American history, women's history, and both American and Asian American film history. Heretofore, this critical film has been a missing chapter in these histories. The visionary filmmaker Marion Wong created a feature length film whose storyline was 80 years ahead of its time. She made a technically advanced, full feature dramatic film intended for mainstream audiences in advance of the advent of the Hollywood film industry. Lastly, it is important to examine how an extended family and a small ethnic community, the Oakland Chinese American

community, assisted this young Chinese American woman in creating the first known existing Chinese American film.

## Epilogue

Real Life after *The Curse of Quon Gwon*:

- **Chin See** (“Mother-in-Law”) – My maternal great grandmother Chin See actively supported Marion. In fact, of Chin See’s six children, Marion was the closest to her. Chin See was born in the United States but for her first 15 years, her life was relegated to a small ethnic enclave, San Francisco Chinatown. She spoke primarily Cantonese. The 1911-1912 trip to Hong Kong was her only trip outside of the US. She died in December 1921, five years after the completion of the *The Curse of Quon Gwon*. Shortly after her passing, Jim Sing (age 77), returned to Hoi Ping District in Guangdong Province to spend his last years. He passed away in 1927.
- **Marion Wong** (Writer, Director, Producer, “Villainess”) – My great aunt Marion Wong married Kim Hong in 1917. Marion went on to own several restaurants in Stockton (Duck Inn) and Richmond, California. The Singapore Hut in Richmond was known for its cabaret and Marion entertained guests by singing in English and Italian. She passed away at the age of 74 on

February 4, 1969.

Marcella Wong Yasuhiro remembers Marion being gregarious and, as a child, I remember Aunt Marion always dressed nicely, often wearing a cheong sam with a mink coat. Marion and Kim had five daughters and one son, Henry. Even though Marion was not able to fully live out her aspirations in the performing arts, Arabella Hong-Young, her youngest daughter, graduated from The Juilliard School of Music in New York and Arabella performed on Broadway (as Arabella Hong) as a central cast member (Helen Chao) in the original 1958 production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *Flower Drum Song*. *Flower Drum Song* was the first American musical featuring an all Asian American and Pacific Islander cast. Currently, she is a teacher of singing and acting, singer, actor, author, and director in New York City and the surrounding areas.

- **Violet Wong** (Heroine/Bride) and **Albert Wong** (Rickshaw Runner) – After 1916, my grandparents, Violet and Albert Wong, had four more daughters and one son. A few years after the completion of the film, Violet gave birth to a second daughter, Clara May Wong Mark (my mother), who was born July 7, 1919. Violet and Albert went on to work in the food

industry in El Cerrito, California. In 1945, they opened Violet's Dining Room (10140 San Pablo Avenue) in El Cerrito. It was the first if not one of the first Chinese restaurants in the United States to feature "Da Bin Lo" (Hot Pot). Violet's Dining Room and their home on California Street were the sites of many family gatherings, which Marion and her family also frequently attended. Throughout her life, Violet loved Cantonese opera. On Tuesdays, when Violet's Dining Room was closed, whenever possible, she would go with one of her children or grandchildren to San Francisco Chinatown to enjoy live opera.

- **Stella Wong Lee** (Child at end of film) – Stella Wong Lee, aka Nanying Stella Wong, grew up in Oakland and was a CHSA charter member. She became a renowned artist, poet and writer. Her poetry has been recognized in such volumes as *Ting, Anthology by World Poets*, and *Contemporary American Poetry*. Some of her paintings have been featured in storefronts and interiors such as the famous mural for the Fong-Fong Bakery & Fountain in San Francisco Chinatown that opened in 1935. Stella specialized in watercolor paintings. She was an excellent painter; one watercolor series that I am particularly fond of is her 1940s San Francisco Chinatown community scenes.

Unbeknownst to the public, Stella Wong Lee was a strong supporter of social justice. Long before the advent of the United States' anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Stella advocated to end wars and promote world peace. I specifically remember, when I was a child, how Aunt Stella would never allow my cousins and I to watch any war movies on T.V. in the presence of her son Colin. Colin Loy Lee (my first cousin) is an active painter and art teacher at St. Ann's School in New York City.

Gregory Albert Yee Mark is a Professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies at California State University, Sacramento. He received his Doctorate in Criminology from the University of California, Berkeley. His areas of research expertise are community mobilization, youth gangs, youth violence prevention, United States drug legislation, and Chinese American communities, (particularly Honolulu, Hawaii and Oakland, California). Dr. Mark is the grand nephew of Marion Wong who was the creator of the pioneering film *The Curse of Quon Gwon* and the grandson of Violet Wong, the film's leading character and heroine.

### Acknowledgments

This essay has been on my mind for many years but I was always too busy to write it. Thank you to the Hong Kong Film Archive for prompting me to write a companion piece to the Hong Kong Premiere of *The Curse of Quon Gwon*. This essay could not have been accomplished without the help of numerous people.

I owe the idea of preserving this family and Asian American treasure to Violet Wong. In entrusting me to "do something about (the film)," my grandmother showed a great deal of faith in her young grandson. My great aunt Marion Wong showed me the vision, strength and creativity that paved the way to a new frontier in filmmaking.

My family has always supported me, from my sister Carolyn Yee, to my niece Kacy Ogawa, to my nephew Corey Wong, and my cousin Colin Loy Lee. My three aunts

– Gala Irma Wong Davis, Marcella Wong Yasuhiro, Mai-Lon Gittelsohn – who are the daughters of Violet and Albert Wong, have been so helpful bringing the earlier generation back to life for me. My thoughts are always with their older sister and my mother, Clara May Wong Mark. I thank my children Kellen Nainoa Yee Mark and Alexa Kealohi Yee Mark for their continuous support and, now that they are older, their editing skills. Last, to my wife, Christina Fa Mark, who spent many hours talking with me and making many suggestions to improve the essay – my deepest thank you and Aloha.



## Notes

1. Most of the birthdates and romanized Chinese names were taken from the following Immigration and Nationalization case files from The National Archives and Records Administration, Regional Archives, Pacific Region San Francisco, San Bruno, California.

Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944

Case file no. 11096/14285 - WONG Nui Hi (Marion)

Case file no. 11096/14286 - CHIN Chew Lam

Case file no. 11096/14286A - WONG Soon Tung

Case file no. 11096/14287 - WONG So Show (Jim Sing)

Case file no. 11096/14308 - WONG Chung Shee (Violet)

Case file no. 40317/14-7 - WONG Loy Ark (Albert)

Return Certificate Application Case Files of Chinese Americans (9170), 1903-12

Case file no. 9170/883 - CHIN Shee [sic]

For Marion Wong's Chinese name, reference from researcher Frank Bren also point to other sources that romanises her ame as Wong Wan-nee. See Note 14 on P.66.

2. 'The Curse of Quon Gwon [sic] (Mandarin)', *The Moving Picture World*, July 17, 1917, p148.
3. Besides the local showings in 1916 and 1917, there was a spring 1948 showing at the newly re-opened Elmwood Theater in Berkeley, California (originally the Strand Theater (1914-1941), it reopened as the Elmwood in 1947). Approximately 100 of Violet's friends, relatives and Violet's Dining Room customers attended the screening. Gala Irma Wong Davis and Marcella Wong Yasuhiro remember seeing a combination of Chinese American family and friends, and White friends and customers at the event.
4. See Note 2.
5. Note that the Academy's program title 'Lost and Found: Recent Discoveries', at least as it applied to *The Curse of Quon Gwon*, was a misnomer. As will be explained further in the next section, *The Curse of Quon Gwon* was never lost.

6. 'First Chinese Film Drama Written and Portrayed By Girl [sic]', *Oakland Tribune*, May 11, 1916.
7. See note 2.
8. Chalsa Loo, *CHINATOWN: Most Time, Hard Time*, New York: Prager Publishers, 1991, p.47.
9. See note 8. During this time the Chinese population in the United States was 61,639, of which only 7,748 were women (1920 U.S. Census).
10. Interview with Marcella Wong Yasuhiro, December 24, 2013, El Cerrito, California.
11. Refer to note 1, Case file no. 11096/14285 – WONG Nui Hi (Marion).
12. Oakland Public Library, in the Oakland History Room, Oakland, California.
13. In 1912, the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, Inc. established a branch in Niles, California. This movie production studio and others active in the growing film industry in the area around Niles w/Valley preceded Hollywood as the film capital of the United States of America.
14. Refer to note 3.

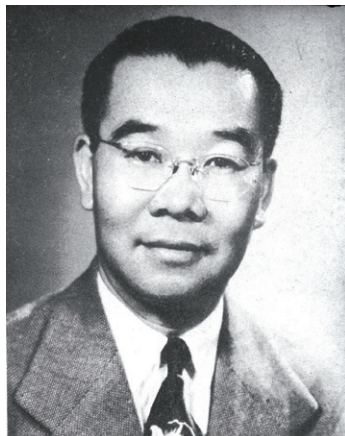
# 從華僑到美籍華人 大觀公司在美製片情況初探

—— 韓燕麗

原載《通訊》第50期，香港電影資料館，2009年11月

## 引言

翻開由美國電影協會（American Film Institute〔AFI〕）編輯出版、網羅1911年至1960年期間在美攝製所有長篇故事片的目錄大全，會發現從1930年代中期到1940年代後半，有20多部華語影片曾經在美國攝製<sup>1</sup>。這些影片幾乎全部是由英文標記為Grandview Film Company或Tai Quon Motion Picture Company的同一所電影公司所攝製。該公司即為1933年7月由趙樹桑（Joseph Sunn Jue，1904－1987）在三藩市（又稱舊金山）唐人街成立的大觀影片公司。現存的各類中英文文獻中，AFI的目錄大全所列出的在美攝製華語影片雖說最為詳盡，但其實也並不完全。本文將首先以現存少量的採訪報導、回憶錄以及大觀公司自身發行的紀念特刊、三藩市發行的中文報紙等文字資料為線索，追溯大觀在美成立影片公司之經緯；並通過



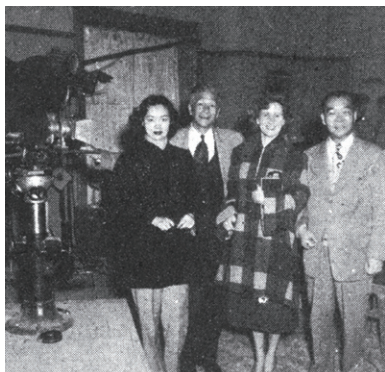
圖一 大觀影片公司創辦人趙樹榮

Fig 1 Joseph Sunn Jue, founder of Grandview Film Company

對現存少數影片的文本分析，探討在異鄉拍攝的華語影片對在美華人共同體的構築、以及身份認同變化所產生的影響。

## 大觀影片公司的成立經緯和初期發展

大觀影片公司的設立者趙樹榮出生於廣東，五歲時即與父兄一起渡美。在美國受教育長大的他少年時代起便醉心荷里活電影，夢想有朝一日擁有自己的電影事業。據其胞弟回憶，趙樹榮十幾歲時就曾經向其美國友人學習製作動畫片，並曾買來一架攝像機自己摸索着攝製過一部無聲電影<sup>2</sup>。趙樹榮的父親趙俊堯是三藩市唐人街中華會館的董事兼司庫，同時經營着農場、製麵場和花店。可以說，趙樹榮成立電影製作公司，資金方面並非大問題。但趙樹榮雖有一腔熱情、且不乏資金，卻由於缺乏實際在片場拍攝影片的經驗，成立製片公司的契機要等



圖二 1954年趙樹榮（右一）、麗兒（左一）、關文清（左二）與到訪香港大觀片場的美國女星瑪麗慕莉

Fig 2 Joseph Sunn Jue (1st right), Lai Yee (1st left) and Kwan Man-ching (2nd left) with American actress Mary Murray at Grandview in Hong Kong in 1954.



圖三 早於1915年勇闖荷里活的關文清，協助成立大觀。

Fig 3 Kwan Man-ching, who ventured into Hollywood as early as 1915, was another key figure behind the founding of Grandview.

到1932年他與另一位關鍵人物相遇之時。

同樣是出生於廣東的關文清（1896 - 1995），1915年年方弱冠便憑着對電影的熱愛隻身闖進荷里活。在荷里活的製片現場做臨時演員，並曾擔任過著名導演格里菲斯《殘花淚》（1919）一片的技術顧問。1920年回國後輾轉於滬港兩地，逐漸在中國國內電影界贏得名聲。1932年，關文清受上海聯華影片有限公司所托，為購買有聲電影的拍攝器材和順便推銷聯華影片再次赴美。關文清抵達三藩市後，趙樹榮來到他在唐人街下榻的酒店，請求關協助在美成立電影公司。關文清回憶道：「劉、關、張、趙同是『龍岡』宗親，在海外，四姓人彼此視同兄弟，有互助的義務」。<sup>3</sup> 這樣，在關文清的幫助下，大觀公司1933年7月在唐人街的大觀酒店正式成立。

三十年代初期，正是無聲片向有聲片過渡的時期，中國國內的各大電影公司都爭相開始製作有聲電影。有聲片時代的到來，不僅成為趙樹榮和關文清相識的契機，直接促成了大觀公司的成立，更是大觀公司成立之後得以順利發展的重要原因之一。據趙樹榮於1947年接受英文雜誌採訪時所說，在大觀成立之前，有過三家在美華人的電影公司曾經製作過無聲片。但三家公司都無法長期維持經營，很快便關門大吉<sup>4</sup>。而大觀從設立當初就立定拍攝有聲片，使用粵語對白，並在影片中插入粵曲演唱片段。北美的中國移民大多來自廣東，比起無聲片或是使用英語、國語等其他語言的有聲片，可以想見他們對粵語影片無疑會抱着更為強烈的親切感。同時期的香港，1933年的粵語有聲片《傻仔洞房》問世後電影事業也興旺活躍起來。有聲片時代的到來，在太平洋兩岸的粵語使用地區同時掀起了電影製作的高潮。

大觀的開山之作是攝製於1933年的《歌侶情潮》，遺憾的是該片現已無法看到。根據文字資料，該片由趙樹榮親自導演。影片描述了在美華人青年的戀愛故事，邀請來美巡迴演出中的粵班伶人新靚就（即日後主演黃飛鴻系列的關德興）和胡蝶影分別擔任男女主角。不約而同地，《歌侶情潮》與同時期在華南和南洋大獲成功的粵語片《白金龍》（1933）都起用了粵劇演員來拍攝時裝電影。但與《白金龍》的主角薛覺先相

比，關德興當時還是無名小輩，明星號召力顯然遠遠不夠。據關文清回憶，趙樹榮和關文清本想邀請馬師曾擔任男主角，但馬以急於回國為由拒絕演出。由此可見，大觀公司成立之初，由於沒有專屬的演員和導演，在人才方面相當困頓。這也是大觀在美成立一年後，很快便將據點轉移到香港的原因之一。

大觀之所以將製片基地遷往香港，起因是關文清提議與聯華公司合作，利用聯華香港第三廠的設備和人才，一起在香港拍攝粵語有聲片。上文提到，關文清本是受聯華所托來美購買攝影器材，他肩負的另一任務是開拓聯華的海外市場。而趙樹榮赴港與聯華合作，也可以利用大公司聯華的人才、設備與國內發行網。聯華和大觀的合作，雖然最後由於聯華固守上海的國語片市場而最終未能實現，但為此滯港一年的趙樹榮親見當時香港電影事業的興旺蓬勃，遂打定主意將香港作為今後的電影製作基地。1934年前後，正是香港及華南地區開始形成足以與上海電影相抗衡的另一華語電影製作據點的重要時期，身處其中的電影人都十分明白粵語片具有不可限量的可能性。此時的趙樹榮，勢必不再滿足於北美唐人街的狹小市場，而將眼光投向包括中國大陸兩廣地區和東南亞在內的更為廣闊的市場。可以說，關文清起初的提議僅僅是趙樹榮臨時赴港的起因，粵語有聲片的勃興才是大觀此後轉移據點回港發展的最大原因。

從1934年到1941年日軍佔領香港為止，大觀在港共拍片





圖四（右起）趙樹榮與女星周坤玲、攝影師Jue Mon-liang於1940年代攝於三藩市大觀公司

Fig 4 (From right) Joseph Sunn Jue, actress Chow Kwun-ling and cinematographer Jue Mon-liang at Grandview in San Francisco in the 1940s.

60餘部。其中多取材於傳統故事或是本地生活，並未涉及在美華人的題材。1939年末，趙樹榮離開瀕臨戰亂的香港回到美國，之後到1948年的十年期間一直在三藩市堅持拍攝粵語電影。這期間攝製的30多部影片對於瞭解在美華人的生活意義重大。可以說，1933年大觀在美拍攝的第一部處女作只不過是實驗性質的小試身手，而真正大展拳腳在美開始有規模的製片，始於趙樹榮返美後的1939年。下一節將對1940年在三藩市公映的《華僑之光》一片加以詳細的考察和分析。

## 華僑共同體的構築：《華僑之光》

1939年底趙樹榮返美後，立即開始着手攝製《華僑之光》。該片雖然現已無法看到，但公映時發行的特刊上所登載的電影本事以章回體小說形式寫成，共九回，頗為詳盡。根據特刊本事，《華僑之光》講述的是一個身無分文、隻身來美的中國移民如何歷盡艱辛，最後成家立業、達成其美國夢的故





圖五 《華僑之光》（1940）：第一代移民的奮鬥史，構築「華僑」共同體

Fig 5 *The Light of Overseas Chinese* (1940) shapes the collective identity of overseas Chinese by trailing the struggles of first generation Chinese emigrants.

事。現將特刊的電影本事摘要如下。

民國初年，中山縣青年趙惠民遠赴美洲三藩市飯店幫傭。勤懇的惠民頗得店主歡心，唯店主之無賴養子唐郁，欺凌惠民並反誣惠民施暴，使得惠民遭店主解僱。惠民欲以一年工作積蓄承頂洗衣店生意，誰知血汗之資早為店中同伴竊去。幸得店中另一同伴福伯聞而憐之，以金錢相助。洗衣營業日佳，但一日竟遭火災。又是一載辛勞，化成灰燼。惠民頻受打擊，未免意氣消沉，但念及慈母臨別贈言，遂又重加振奮。後惠民獲某富僑賞識，富僑病終之際以惠民誠實有

為，以遺產贈之。十數年後，惠民因長袖善舞，事業成功，成為中華商會主席，並與福伯之女育有二子。一日中華會館來電催惠民往解決僑務事，原來是來美當初服務過的飯店店主與其養子唐郁有金錢糾紛。惠民在仲裁會議席間，謂華僑居此，應互相愛助，發揚國光。結果飯店父子修好，唐郁與惠民的宿怨也泯除。惠民次子已是大學生，終日貪玩。惠民夫婦教導其金錢之來，殊非易事，其父亦曾辛苦一生。幼子方悟前非，並決心改過。轉眼惠民抵美已達三十年，今事業既達，兩子亦向正道而馳。惠民夫婦遂歸去故里，幸母仍健在，為彼述別時情況，猶似昨日事矣。

《華僑之光》講述的是第一代移民的個人奮鬥史，重點描寫了主人公辛酸困苦的青年時代以及為教育下一代而煞費苦心的老年時期，不難想像，各個年齡階層的華人觀眾都能在不同時期的趙惠民身上找到自己的影子，從而很容易對這個故事產生共鳴。再加上影片結尾主人公最終回到故鄉，這一大團圓結局對於當時的華人觀眾來說無疑是極為圓滿的。因為當時在美華人的夢想和奮鬥目標並非扎根異國，而是早日積聚財產、衣錦還鄉。影片最終在三藩市唐人街的大中華戲院連映六天，據說票房收入打破了在美上映華語影片的記錄。

不過，細讀電影故事特別是後半部份，不難發現，《華僑之光》講述的並非僅僅是一個移民努力上進、最終出人頭地的故事。影片的另一重要情節是描述華人社團內部的紛爭及其解決過程，並呼籲在美華人的一致團結。眾所周知，在美華人自十九世紀以來，遭受了種種歧視和不公平待遇。但影片中主人公所遭遇的種種挫折與打擊，卻並非來自美國白人社會，而是華人的移民夥伴。同在異鄉的移民之間團結互助或許會被認為是理所當然的事情，但實際情況並非如此簡單。

北美華人雖然大都來自廣東，但出身地區、鄉鎮不同，使用方言以及生活習慣也殊為不同。為數眾多的同鄉、同姓團體之間不乏爭擾。被稱為「堂鬥」（Tong War）的華人秘密結社之間的衝突也十分頻繁與激烈。據統計，大規模的堂鬥僅在二十年代之前就發生過六、七十次。堂鬥有時甚至動用炸彈，總計三百名以上的華人移民因堂鬥而喪生，美國警察也對此束手無策。<sup>5</sup>

消解中國移民之間一直以來就存在的或大或小的種種爭鬥，通過「華僑」，也就是「僑居海外的中國國民」這個象徵着統一身份認同的稱謂來加強他們的團結，是《華僑之光》一片除了個人奮鬥史以外的另一重要主題。在配合該片上映而出版的特刊上，趙樹榮親自撰文闡明自己製作該片的起因：「當

六、七年前，我還在美洲攝製《歌侶情潮》的時候，僑胞，還有為了一點小小的意見而對立着，越弄越糟，緣因是大家兄弟絕不肯認錯。但今回，我一踏上三藩市，情形已經兩樣了：中國人老是愛中國人。大家總是快活地忍耐地奮鬥着。他們不再有內爭。他們肯出錢出力去爭取的，只是全民族對外最後的勝利而已。他們現已都是刎頸交的好朋友，大家都是『先國家之急，而後私讎』了。」<sup>6</sup>

趙樹桑文中所說的「國家之急」，指的當然是1937年開始的全面抗日戰爭。民族意識往往在國家存亡的危機關頭急遽增強。在抗日救國的號召之下，在美華人原本具有的基於同鄉、同業等傳統歸屬的小型共同體，被更為廣泛統一的國民身份，也就是名為「華僑」的堅韌紐帶團結起來。《華僑之光》中，惠民在中華會館的仲裁會議上呼籲僑胞一致團結的一場戲，無疑能夠喚醒他們原本並不強烈的國家意識。特刊上大幅登載了這場戲的劇照，並在照片空白處全文記載着主人公力陳「我們也要負重整山河的責任」的長篇台詞。可想而知，這一場景一定是影片的高潮戲之一。此時，放映華語電影的電影院，已經不僅僅是中國移民閒暇時的娛樂場所。原本操各種廣東方言的他們，在共同欣賞着使用單一語言的電影作品時，多樣複雜的身份認同不但藉此得以均化，「華僑」這一個共同體意識也同時得以增強。



## 從華僑到華人：銀幕上的實像與虛像

攝製於國內抗日戰爭風雲突起時期的《華僑之光》，從第一代移民的視點描寫在美華人的生活，強調國難當前、華僑同胞應該團結，並以衣錦還鄉作為全片的大團圓結局。但是，1945年二次大戰結束後在美攝製的大觀電影，卻在主題和形式上與《華僑之光》殊為不同。大觀在美所攝影片，筆者僅看到七部，其中六部攝於戰後。細看六部作品，首先，移民的第一代不再是主角，影片中父母不是未曾提及（《金粉霓裳》〔1946〕、《黑市夫妻》〔1946〕、《爭妍鬥麗》〔1947〕），便是被作為揶揄的對象（《海角情鴛》〔1946〕、《暴雨梨花》〔1947〕、《狂風逐燕飛》〔1948〕）。<sup>7</sup> 這些影片的攝製時期與《華僑之光》相差不到十年，如果僅僅將原因解釋為移民的更新換代，似太牽強。





圖六至八 《海角情鴛》（1947）：人生何處不是家——模仿美國生活方式

Fig 6-8 *Eternal Love* (1947) reflects the desire of overseas Chinese to imitate the American lifestyle and find for themselves a real home in the foreign society.

和《華僑之光》相比，戰後攝製的大觀影片除了對父輩的描寫極為不同之外，影片中出場人物的社會地位也發生了極大變化。

二十世紀前半，大多數在美華人的生活圈子局限在唐人街，所從事的行業也以洗衣、飲食業為多。從這個方面來說，《華僑之光》的主人公先後在飯店和洗衣店工作的情節，較真實地反映了當時在美華人的生活現實。但是，現存六部的戰後大觀電影中，登場人物卻多是公司老闆、農場主人以及律師等社會成功人士。他們生活的場所，有時是郊外高級住宅區的一棟洋房、有時是寬闊開放的農場，並不局限於唐人街之中。影片中的出場人物身穿洋裝、用刀叉進餐，偶爾還會向白人商家購買寶石等高檔商品。家中有戴着花邊帽的女傭伺候，出門入住酒店也有黑人服務生搬運行李。他們在影片中雖然只講隻言

片語的英文，但似乎已毫無問題地完全融入美國社會，充分享受着百分之百的美式生活。更為奇妙的是，這些影片只描寫主人公當前在美生活的喜怒哀樂，中國國內或是回國的話題，則幾乎未曾提及。像《華僑之光》那樣，強調最終要返回中國故鄉的影片，為何從戰後的唐人街電影院裏消失蹤影了呢？

雖然製作年份只相差數年，但這其間爆發的太平洋戰爭（1941年12月7日至1945年8月15日），給中國移民的處境帶來了根本性的變化。1941年12月日美開戰後，隨着中美兩國政府結成對日同盟，1882年以來持續了數十年的排華法案也在1943年12月撤銷。自此，來自中國的移民終於有權申請歸化美國國籍。作為美國公民在美國定居成為可能的1943年，對於在美華人歸屬意識的變化無疑是一個巨大的轉捩點。1945年以後，中國大陸持續戰亂，而物質生活豐富的美利堅又終於敞開了門戶，十分自然地，在美華人「金山」淘金即回國的想法開始轉變，他們開始考慮將美國作為定居養老的地方。尤其是1945年12月後，「戰爭新娘法」頒佈，規定二戰期間曾經從軍的中國移民可以將妻兒從中國接來美國。據統計，太平洋戰爭期間美軍部隊僅是陸軍中就有一萬三千人左右的華人服役，而所有從軍華人佔在美華人總數的五分之一之多。<sup>8</sup> 隨着唐人街中女性的增多，曾經一度被稱做「獨身男性社會」的華人共同體終於能夠以家庭為單位而逐漸安定下來。

大眾文化總是必須緊跟觀眾的動向，在美製片的大觀公司也必定關注種種軍事、政治的風雲變幻，以及由此所引起的在美華人觀眾的心態變動。戰後所攝影片之主題與風格的戲劇性變化，可以說正是敏銳觀察與對應在美華人觀眾口味的必然結果。

美國華人歷史學會所出版的華人歷史圖冊，將戰中至戰後的一段歷史記述標上「可能實現的夢想」的標題，並對這段時期在美華人的動態總結道：「當華人在美國社會的地位逐漸改善時，華人社區努力爭取白人社會的好感，在活動方面也模仿美國生活方式」。<sup>9</sup> 可以說，大觀影片所描繪的，正是這種對「美國生活方式」的過度「模仿」。通過影片中我們所看到的，是在成為美國公民的「夢想」變得「可能實現」時，在美華人從服飾等外觀方面到自由民主等所謂美國價值觀方面，都自覺模仿美國作風，嘗試做一個「真正」美國人的努力和矯枉過正。當然，大觀的影片並非紀錄片，影片中所描寫的華人已完全融入美國社會的種種情景，或許只是銀幕上的虛像，但他們當時模仿美國生活方式的努力以及急欲成為真正美國人的情緒，卻真實地投影在電影的膠片上。

## 失憶症的政治學：《海角情鴛》

歷史書上短短幾行平淡的記載並不能夠盡述由華僑向美籍



華人身份轉換過程中所產生的猶疑和掙扎。而在當時由在美華人製作的電影中，卻以不易察覺的形式留下種種痕跡。1946年攝製的彩色片《海角情鴛》就是這樣一部劇情耐人尋味的電影。<sup>10</sup>

《海角情鴛》是一部以失憶症為主題的影片。影片一開場，便是二戰期間從軍參戰而患上失憶症的男主人公試圖從療養院逃跑的鏡頭。主人公被療養院的人抓住後仍不停掙扎，騷亂中畫外音突然傳來動聽的歌聲，被歌聲吸引的主人公隨即安靜下來側耳傾聽。這首主題曲，之後在劇情發生重要轉折時多次配上字幕演唱，以下是歌詞中的一段：「人生何處不是家，任你去到海角天涯，楊梅到處一樣花，莫愁掛，往事如煙，請放下。」

伴隨規勸失憶症患者「放下」往事，而非「想起」往事的歌聲出現的，是美麗的療養院護士美娟。之後如我們所料想的，兩人墮入情網。美娟將主人公帶回家，美娟的父親是一位好酒又懼內的滑稽老先生，影片並未交代他的職業，但一家人住在海邊帶花園的洋房中，生活頗為殷實。老先生發現女兒的戀人居然答不上自己的姓名和出生地，自然反對兩人交往，但美娟力爭婚姻戀愛自由，兩人終成眷屬。婚後夫婦倆一起蕩舟出海，以藍天碧海為背景，滿面笑意的主人公唱起片頭美娟曾經為他唱過的那首主題曲。此時，在新天地構築起新生活的

他，已經沒有必要想起姓名以及出生地等等與自己以前身份相關的種種「如煙往事」，而只需在這「海角天涯」充分享受當下的幸福生活便可。「人生何處不是家」的歌詞，此時必定打動了不少電影院中的華人觀眾的心。

和所有以失憶症為主題的影片一樣，主人公由於某天頭部遭到撞擊，一瞬間想起所有往事，相反又將和美娟的一段記憶完全忘記。原來他是城中資本家的公子，並且已有未婚妻。影片的後半部份便圍繞美娟如何讓他想起曾經一起戀愛結婚的那段生活而展開。當然，如觀眾所期待的，主人公偶爾再一次聽到片頭的主題曲，由此記憶完全恢復，再次回到美娟身邊。影片未再交代有關他以前的未婚妻和家人如何，似乎完全喪失有關過去的記憶正是美娟以及觀眾所期盼的。影片的最後一場，主人公攜妻子和剛出世的小孩、以及妻子的父母，一家人歡歡喜喜地在鄰居的祝福聲中外出旅遊。這裏，他已經成功地開創出和從前的自己毫無關聯的圓滿新生活。影片的最後一個鏡頭中，一家人乘坐的旅遊巴士駛上金門大橋，向着遠方駛去。特意拍攝了外景的這個鏡頭，似乎正預告着他們新生活幸福光明的未來。

從華僑這一美國社會的外來者到美籍華人的身份轉換過程，決非一朝一夕，其間也必定會伴隨着內心的糾葛與不適。一方面欲在新大陸開始新生活，同時又難捨對舊身份的依戀，

如同影片主人公一般患上失憶症可能是最為乾脆的解脫方式呢！《海角情鴛》的情節，表面看起來似乎只是普通的家庭倫理劇，但細讀影片的文本，不難從中看出當時中國移民矛盾心情的投射。1946年拍攝的這部華語電影，不僅反映了華僑與華人的分界線尚未十分明確時期移民歸屬意識的搖擺不定，還極有可能在某種程度上潛移默化地影響着他們的決斷。在美華人所攝製的這些粵語電影，令我們看到了其他類型的史料無法顯示的珍貴一幕。

## 結語

1948年末，趙樹榮再赴香港重整旗鼓。至1954年大觀結束拍片為止，共在港製片20餘部，但都是與在美華人無關的題材。趙樹榮1954年返美後直到1987年作古為止，未再發展和電影相關的事業。曾經在美製作的30餘部粵語片，以及其中所刻錄的華人移民心境變化的影像，也長時間被世人遺忘。本文利用現存極為少量的影片以及文字資料，在嘗試釐清大觀公司在美製片情況的同時，初步分析了影片中所折射的華人身份認同的轉變過程。由於資料所限，很多未能探明的電影史尚待今後做進一步的調查和研究。

**韓燕麗**，日本京都大學博士。現為日本關西學院大學副教授。專研中國電影史、日本電影史。

本文能夠成文，幸得羅卡先生提供個人收集之珍貴資料，在此深表感謝。

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### 註釋

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6. 趙樹燊：〈我為甚麼要製作《華僑之光》〉，《華僑之光》特刊，香港：大觀聲片有限公司，1940。
7. 一直以來，有關大觀影片的所有中英文資料，均有定論認為第二次世界大戰期間大觀在美國拍攝彩色片，戰後運至香港放映。但根據筆者的調查，大觀所有彩色片均為戰後拍攝。本文標示的影片年份為在美首映年份。
8. 曾瑞炎：《華僑與抗日戰爭》，成都：四川大學出版社，1988，頁290。
9. 美國華人歷史學會編：《僑美華人歷史圖片》，三藩市：美國華人歷史學會，2001。
10. 《海角情鴛》於1946年12月23日在三藩市大觀劇院上映，1947年2月13日在香港上映。

# From Overseas Chinese to Chinese Americans: A Preliminary Study of Grandview Film Productions in the United States

— Han Yanli

If one browses through the catalogue of all feature films produced in the US between 1911–1960 compiled by the American Film Institute (AFI), one will find that there were over 20 Chinese language films produced in the US from the mid-1930s and the latter half of the 1940s.<sup>1</sup> And most of these films were credited as productions of Grandview Film Company or Tai Quon Motion Picture Company, the studio founded by Joseph Sunn Jue (1904–1987; Chiu Shu-sun in Cantonese; Zhao Shushen in pinyin) in San Francisco Chinatown in July 1933. The AFI catalogue listing the entries of Chinese language films is the most comprehensive of all existing Chinese and English documentations on Chinese language films made in the US, although there remain gaps to be filled. Based on clues gleaned from the scanty amount of interviews, reports and memoirs, together with commemorative brochures published by Grandview and Chinese newspapers published in San Francisco,

this article will attempt to trace the chronology of events leading to the establishment of Grandview in the US; and to explore, by analysing the handful of surviving texts, the influence these foreign-made Chinese language films had on the construction of Chinese community and the shaping of the unsettled identity among Chinese immigrants in the US.

### The genesis and early development of Grandview

Joseph Sunn Jue, founder of Grandview, was born in Guangdong and moved to the US at the age of five with his family. Raised and educated in the US, he grew up living the Hollywood dream of owning his movie business one day. As his younger brother recalled, Jue had, as early as his teenage years, sought to learn the making of animated cartoons from an American friend and bought himself a camera and shot a silent film as self-experimentation.<sup>2</sup> His father,

Jun You-jew, was an executive secretary and treasurer of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in San Francisco, where he ran a range of businesses from farming to noodle-making and floristry. It can be safely assumed that the son had an advantage in the money department when starting his film company. While he lacked neither passion and enthusiasm nor capital, the novice was short on practical filmmaking experience. Conditions were not ripe for his filmmaking plan to materialise until in 1932 when another key personnel crossed his path.

In 1925, a year shy of his 20s, the Guangdong-born Kwan Man-ching (aka Moon Kwan, 1896–1995) worked his way into Hollywood. Armed with nothing but a passion for filmmaking, he carved a place for himself, from working as an extra on Hollywood sets to serving as technical advisor to DW Griffith in *Broken Blossoms* (1919). Upon returning to China in 1920, Kwan split his time between Shanghai and Hong Kong and acquired a rising reputation in the Chinese cinema. In 1932, United Photoplay Service Limited of Shanghai entrusted to him the job of purchasing equipment for shooting sound films and marketing its productions over in the US. Back in San Francisco, he was greeted by Jue, who came to visit him in his hotel in Chinatown, enlisting his assistance in setting up a film company in the US. ‘The Lius, the Kwans, the Cheungs and the Chius are affiliated under the “Lung Kong”

clan; abroad, the four clans are considered as clan brothers and sisters, which calls for a duty of helping fellow clansmen,' Kwan reminisced.<sup>3</sup> The visit and Kwan's backing led to the inauguration of Grandview Film Company in July 1933, at Grandview Hotel in San Francisco Chinatown.

The early 1930s marked the transition from silents to talkies, a phase of filmmaking which saw Chinese studios big and small trying to outdo their competition in the talkie craze. The dawning of the sound era not only brought about the meeting of Jue and Kwan, hastening the establishment of Grandview as a result, it was also one of the key factors that expedited the growth of the fledgling studio. According to an interview Jue gave to an English magazine in 1947, prior to the establishment of Grandview, there were three Chinese film companies which made silent films in the US. But the three companies were unable to keep their businesses afloat and went out of business.<sup>4</sup> Grandview, however, set out to make sound films with dialogues delivered in Cantonese and peppered with Cantonese operatic excerpts. Since the majority of the Chinese immigrants in North America hailed from Guangdong, these Cantonese films naturally struck a more familiar, affectionate note with the Chinese community than silent or sound films made in English, Mandarin or other languages. Over in Hong Kong, the filmmaking industry was flourishing, boosted by the release of the Cantonese talkie,



*The Idiot's Wedding Night*, in 1933. The arrival of the sound age propelled filmmaking in the Cantonese-speaking regions on both sides of the Pacific Ocean to new heights.

Grandview's debut production, *Romance of the Songsters* of 1933, was sadly irretrievably lost. But Jue was billed as director in existing textual material. This love story of two young Chinese Americans had Sun Leng Chau (better known as Kwan Tak-hing, the leading man of the long-running Wong Fei-hung series) and Wu Tip-ying as the leading man and lady. In a remarkable coincidence, *The Platinum Dragon* (1933), which was taking Southern China and Southeast Asia box-offices by storm, resembled *Songsters* in casting Cantonese opera players for a contemporary costume film. But Kwan Tak-hing was a relatively obscure newcomer then, a far cry from the stature and crowd-pulling capacities of *Dragon's* Sit Kwok-sin. According to Kwan Man-ching's recollection, Jue and himself wanted Ma Si-tsang for the role but the opera star declined, citing his impending return to China. This initial hiccup suggested that Grandview at its early days was severely hindered by a shortage of talent, the result of not having its own stable of actors and directors. It was one of the deciding factors behind the studio's relocation of its production base to Hong Kong a year after its establishment in the US.

The subject of relocation was first raised by Kwan, who suggested collaborating with United Photoplay and leveraging the readily available equipment and talent of its third studio in Hong Kong to make sound films locally. In front of him was another mission: to open new markets overseas for United Photoplay. By partnering with United Photoplay in Hong Kong, Jue would be well positioned to leverage the talent, facilities and distribution networks on the Mainland of a major studio. The collaboration fell through due to United Photoplay's reluctance to venture away from its Mandarin cinema stronghold in Shanghai. Regardless, Jue, who had been kept in Hong Kong for over a year, made up his mind to base his production in Hong Kong, encouraged by the boom of the local filmmaking industry. The years around 1934 were an important formative time for Hong Kong and Southern China to develop into a Chinese filmmaking hub that rivalled its Shanghai counterpart. Filmmakers working in the industry were astutely aware of the infinite possibilities of Cantonese film. It was obvious that Jue no longer had eyes just for the small markets of Chinatowns in North America, instead casting his gaze far and wide for a bigger pond that stretched from Guangdong and Guangxi in Mainland China to Southeast Asia. While it was Kwan's proposal that sent Jue on a sojourn Hong Kong, it was the thriving Cantonese sound film industry that dictated the latter's decision to relocate the production base of Grandview to Hong Kong.

From 1934 to the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in 1941, Grandview has produced more than 60 films in Hong Kong. Many of the films were adapted from traditional folk tales or inspired by the day-to-day life of Hong Kong, and the subject of American Chinese was never broached. At the end of 1939, Jue left war-ravaged Hong Kong and returned to the US, in San Francisco, taking no exception to his insistence on making films in Cantonese during the decade up to 1948. The over 30 films produced during this period contributed greatly to understanding the life of Chinese immigrants at the time. The first film Grandview made in the US in 1933 was arguably a small experiment to test the waters, and it wasn't until in 1939 when Jue returned to the US that he launched into full-scale production and flexed his filmmaking muscle. The next section will give a detailed analysis and study of *The Light of Overseas Chinese*, which was released in San Francisco in 1940.

### The construction of an overseas Chinese collective: *The Light of Overseas Chinese*

No sooner than Jue returned to the US near the end of 1939 than he threw himself into the pre-production of *The Light of Overseas Chinese*. Though the film itself is no longer in existence, the brochure that accompanied the film premiere contains a detailed synopsis written in the format of a chapter-novel (zhanghui

xiaoshuo) that spans nine chapters. According to the synopsis, *Light* is essentially a story of the American dream comes true for a Chinese immigrant, who goes from being penniless and alone in the US to having a happy family and a successful career through all kinds of hardships and afflictions. Below is a summary of the synopsis:

In the first years of the Early Republican period, Chiu Wai-man leaves his native Zhongshan for the US, to work in a restaurant in San Francisco. The diligent worker is much liked by the restaurant owner. But Tang Yuk, the adopted son of the boss, bullies the newcomer and accuses him of using violence, resulting in his dismissal. A year later, Chiu proposes to buy out a laundrette with the money he's saved up from the year's wages, only to have his hard-earned savings stolen by a co-worker. Uncle Fuk, a colleague, sympathises with his plight and secures Chiu the business from his own pocket. Just as business begins to pick up, a fire strikes, his lifetime of toil and sweat razed to the ground. Despite dispirited by the series of painful blows, Wai-man picks himself up remembering the words of his mother at their farewell. Later, he gets noticed by a wealthy Chinese businessman who, impressed by his honesty and abilities, leaves him his fortune. More than a decade later, the business-savvy Wai-man makes a name for himself and becomes the chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Soon, he marries Uncle Fuk's daughter and the couple raise two children. One day,

Wai-man receives a call from the chamber asking him for his help in a dispute involving fellow Chinese members. The matter turns out to be a money dispute between the restaurant owner, his boss from many years ago, and the boss's adopted son, Tang Yuk. During the arbitration, Wai-man asserts that all overseas Chinese living in the US should love and help each other and exalt the light of their native country. The father and the son reconcile and the grudges Tang Yuk holds against Wai-man forgotten. Back home, Wai-man's younger son, a university graduate, indulges in pleasure. The couple gives him a lesson in money and tells the story of the father's arduous journey to success. The son sees the errors of his ways and makes amends. Time flies and it's been three decades since Wai-man first set foot in the country. With a well-established career and two sons who are on the right track in life, Wai-man and wife decide it's time to come home. To their immense joy, the couple finds the mother in good health. Reminiscences flow freely, as if not a single day has gone by since Man-man left home.

*Light* is the story of the struggles and hardships of the first-generation Chinese immigrants. The focuses on the miseries the protagonist endures in his young adult life and the tremendous efforts that he puts into educating the children in his middle age strike an instant chord with Chinese audiences of all ages, who identify with the character Chiu Wai-man and his life story easily.

Chiu's return to his motherland at the end of the film gives a most perfect ending to the Chinese audiences at the time. It is because for the Chinese immigrants in the US, the goals of their struggles and their ultimate dream were never to strike roots in a foreign land but rather to return to their motherland with the fruits of their lifelong labour. *Light* was shown in the Great China Theatre in San Francisco Chinatown for six consecutive days, smashing all previous records of any Chinese language film shown in the US.

Yet, going over the story plot in detail, especially the latter half, one will quickly come to realise that *Light* is more than just a story of success for an immigrant who beats the odds in life with a will of steel and hard work. Much of the plot is woven around the disputes troubling the Chinese community and their resolutions, which are invariably concluded by the call for all Chinese immigrants to be united. It is common knowledge that Chinese immigrants were subject to all kinds of racial discrimination and mistreatment since the 19th century. In the film, the setbacks and blows dealt to the protagonist do not come from the mainstream American society, but rather from Chinese immigrants and his own people. Unity and mutual support among immigrants living in a foreign land are qualities often taken for granted, though the reality suggests otherwise.

While most Chinese immigrants hailed from Guangdong, there existed individual differences in the regions, villages and towns of their origins, dialects and living habits. Disputes were rife among fellow village folks and clansmen. The so-called Tong Wars and conflicts between gangs of Chinese immigrants were frequent and intense. Statistics show that some 60, 70 full-blown Tong Wars had taken place in the years before 1920. Bombs were used in the worst of these Tong Wars with an estimated 300 and more casualties among the Chinese immigrants over the years, often putting the US police at their wits' end.<sup>5</sup>

Besides the story of personal struggles, the film also explores the resolution of disputes of various types and degrees among Chinese immigrants through identification with the symbolic collective identity of 'Overseas Chinese', or 'Chinese nationals living overseas'. In the brochure, Jue explains how the idea for the film came about: 'Some six, seven years ago when I was making *Romance of the Songsters* in America, I found that overseas Chinese back then bore enmity towards each other over the smallest difference in opinion, which seemed to worsen by their absolute refusal to apologise to fellow clansmen. However, upon returning to San Francisco this time, I noticed things have turned around completely: Chinese people having nothing but love for each other. They persevere, work hard and endure with a smile on their face. Gone is the internal rife. The

only thing they fight for with their money and toil is a final victory as a people, a race. They're the best of friends, putting "national calamity before personal enmity."<sup>6</sup>

The 'national calamity' Jue refers to was the anti-Japanese war that broke out in 1937. The rise of a national consciousness often coincides with times of national crises or matters of life and death for a race. Summoned by the call of war resistance, Chinese immigrants, who were affiliated to small communities based on such traditional classifications as clans and trades, were then united under the banner of a national identity, joined together by the solid bond of 'overseas Chinese'. In *Light*, the scene of the arbitration at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce during which Wai-man calls on all overseas Chinese to unite together indubitably serves to reawaken their dormant national consciousness. A still of the scene is featured in the brochure, with the entirety of Wai-man's heartfelt speech of 'We, too, must shoulder the responsibility of rebuilding our country' taking up the space around the image, suggesting that this is one of the dramatic climaxes of the film. Back then, cinemas that screened Chinese language films served a function of greater importance than merely as venues of entertainment and leisure for Chinese immigrants. In watching a work of film delivered in a singular language, these speakers of different Cantonese dialects and their multitudinous, varied identities became homogenised and their collective consciousness of 'overseas Chinese' strengthened.



## From overseas Chinese to Chinese Americans : reality and virtuality on the silver screen

Filmed at the time when China was torn by the turmoil of the Anti-Japanese war, *Light* portrays the life of Chinese immigrants from the perspective of the first-generation Chinese immigrants, emphasising the need for fellow countrymen to be united in the face of national crises and finishing the message with a happy ending of a glorious homecoming. Grandview's post-war productions filmed in the US, however, were a far cry from *Light*, both in subject and form. Of all Grandview productions made in the US, I had only access to seven titles, six of which were filmed after the war. These six films no longer centre around first-generation Chinese immigrants; the parent's generation is either deemed unworthy of mention (in *White Powder and Neon Lights* [1946], *Black Market Couple* [1946], *Show Off Your Beauty* [1947]) or depicted as objects of ridicule (in *The Lovers' Reunion* [aka *Eternal Love*, 1946]), *Pear Flower in the Storm* [1947], *A Strong Wind Banishes the Swallow* [1948]).<sup>7</sup> Since *Light* and these later films were separated by a span of less than a decade, such drastic change cannot be satisfactorily explained by a generational change within the Chinese immigrant community.

Compared with *Light*, these later films of Grandview not only present a vastly different portrayal from the parent's generation,

there also appears a drastic change in the social status of these new characters.

In the earlier half of the 20th century, Chinese immigrants were socially and economically confined to Chinatowns, engaging in ethnic Chinese business interests such as laundry and catering. In this regards, the plot of *Light* with the protagonist working in a restaurant and a launderette accurately reflects the life of Chinese immigrants at the time. However, the six existing post-war Grandview films are populated with socially successful characters, such as company bosses, farm owners and lawyers. Their residences are often detached houses located in prime residential areas, sometimes out on expansive farm estates but never limited to the confines of Chinatowns. They dress themselves in western attires, eat with forks and knives and occasionally make purchases of valuable commodities such as gems and precious stones from Caucasian sellers. They live in households served by maids wearing lace-trimmed hats and, away on trips and holidays, stay at hotels staffed with black porters carrying their luggage. Though the characters talk in Chinese with only a few English phrases dropped in occasionally, they appear to have little problem blending into mainstream US society and enjoying a 100% American life. Perhaps even more remarkable is that these films are entirely devoted to the life of the characters and their joys and sorrows but make little mention, if any,

of issues concerning China or homecoming. What is the real reason behind the disappearance of films like *Light* with its emphasis on the ultimate goal of returning to the motherland of China from the silver screens in Chinatown theatres?

A fundamental change of circumstances regarding Chinese immigrants in the US has occurred during the few-year gap in production years – the outbreak of the Pacific War (between 7 December 1941 and 15 August 1945). The US declaration of war on Japan in December 1941 and its alliance with China against Japan were followed by the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 in December 1943 (or the passage of the Magnuson Act, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943), permitting some Chinese immigrants already residing in the country to become neutralised citizens. 1943, the year Chinese Americans were first granted citizenship and permanent residency, marked a momentous turning point in the consciousness of belonging among Chinese immigrants. As war continued to rage in China after 1945 and America with its affluence opened its doors, Chinese immigrants were naturally disposed to abandon the thought of returning to the motherland with their life savings and began to see the US as home in their old age. The idea was cemented when the Chinese War Brides Act was enacted in December 1945, allowing the spouses and children of Chinese immigrants who served in the United States military during

WWII to enter the US. It was estimated that there were some 13,000 Chinese servicemen in the US army alone, or one-fifth of the entire Chinese American population.<sup>8</sup> Following the surge in the women populations across US Chinatowns, the existing Chinese communities commonly referred to as ‘Bachelor Societies’ finally had their roots in the US as organisational units of families.

Popular culture always has its finger on the pulse of the people. Grandview and its filmmaking base in the US, too, kept abreast of the changing military and political situations in order to gauge the changing attitudes and moods of the Chinese American audience. The dramatic change to the subject and style of its post-war films would be the natural outcome of this astute observation about the changing tastes of the Chinese American audience.

The pictorial of Chinese history published by the Chinese Historical Society of America gives an historical account of mid-war to post-war eras and headlines it ‘The Possible Dream’. It also charts the happenings of Chinese Americans during this period of time, concluding by writing: ‘As Chinese began moving up the social ladder in American society, the Chinese community with their improved status found themselves imitating and adapting to the American way of life in a bid to win favour with the mainstream Caucasian community.’<sup>9</sup> Grandview’s portrayals on the screen are

plausibly an ‘over-imitation’ of this American way of life. From them, we see the ‘dream’ of becoming an American citizen turn into a ‘possibility’, whereby Chinese immigrants were consciously imitating the American way, with its attitudes to the most fundamental of American values such as freedom and democracy, making great efforts and going to incredible lengths to reinvent themselves as bona fide American citizens. While not documentaries per se, Grandview’s depictions of Chinese immigrants being fully integrated into US society might very well be virtuality on the silver screen, the efforts they made in mimicking the American way of life and their earnestness in reinventing themselves as bona fide American citizens were faithfully represented on celluloid.

### The political science of amnesia: *Eternal Love*

A few lines in the history books do little justice to the many doubts and struggles Chinese Americans experienced during these cultural and personal identity transitions. It was the films produced by Chinese Americans that inadvertently preserve a wealth of remnants of that era.

*Eternal Love*<sup>10</sup> is essentially a story about amnesia. The film opens with the attempted escape of a WWII soldier from a sanatorium where he is treated for amnesia. Despite being caught, the man tries desperately to wriggle himself free from his captors.

Amid the chaos comes a voice of singing, so sweet and soothing that the escapee calms down at once and tunes in to the melody. This theme song, subtitled, will be making a recurring appearance throughout the film to coincide with major plot twists. A segment of the lyrics reads: ‘Home is everywhere. / No matter where you are in the world, bayberries flowers bloom regardless. / Don’t carry worries around with you. Things will waft right past you like a plume of smoke. Let go.’

What accompaies the nugget of advice for the amnesia patient to ‘let go’ (not the singing that prompts the ‘remembering’ of things past) is the pretty nurse from the sanatorium, Mei-kuen. The two fall in love as the audience expected. No sooner, Mei-kuen brings him home to meet her father, a funny, henpecked man who has a weakness for the bottle. The film makes no mention of his profession, but a family that owns a coastal property completed with gardens to front and rear would be considered as more than comfortably-off. Shocked by the man’s failure to give either his name or birthplace, the father naturally opposes his darling daughter’s choice of a lover and a prospective husband. But Mei-kuen remains adamant in her fight for the freedom to marry the man she loves. The lovers marry. The newlyweds set sail, and against a clear blue sky and a turquoise sea, with a bright grin on his face, the husband begins humming the song that she first sang to him at the beginning of the film.

Starting a new life in a new place, he has no more need for names and birthplaces belonging to ‘the plume of smoke’ that is ‘the past’. What matters now in ‘this world’ of his is to enjoy the new-found happiness. The lyrics to ‘Home is Everywhere’ were bound to tug at the heartstrings of the Chinese audience at the time.

As with all films about amnesia, the condition of the protagonist is reversed by a stroke of fate – a thump on the head, bringing back all old memories and erasing those he created and shared with Mei-kuen. In his former life, he was the son of an entrepreneur, the fiancé of a woman. The latter half of the film is devoted to Mei-kuen’s efforts to awaken his forgotten memories of their love and marriage. It takes the audience little guesswork to figure out that it is the theme song that brings back his memory and prompts his reunion with Mei-kuen. The ending does not account for what happened to the ex-fiancée and family, the memories of this episode of his life irrevocably erased as if to fulfil the expectations of Mei-kuen and the audience alike. The final last scene sees the man, his wife and their newborn child, together with his in-laws, set off on holiday abroad amid a shower of blessings from their neighbours. Here is a man who has succeeded in finding a happy new life that bears no kin to his past. In the last shot of the film, the family is on board a coach heading out to the Golden Gate Bridge into the horizon, an exterior shot envisaging a bright future for their happy new life.

For Chinese Americans back then, the transition of identities as newcomers to American society did not happen overnight; it also came with more than its fair share of internal conflicts and uneasiness. For people torn between a desire to start a new life in a new land and a reluctance to abandon their old identities, amnesia of the kind suffered by our protagonist appears to be the perfect, clear-cut way out! At first glance, the plot of *Reunion* varies little from what one would find in an average melodrama. But take a closer look at the synopsis and the projection of the dilemmas and conflicting emotions these Chinese immigrants were facing is all too apparent. This 1946 production not only reflects the precariousness of the then immigrant consciousness and sense of belonging when a divide between overseas Chinese and Chinese nationals had yet to be drawn, it's highly probable that the film had a hand in subconsciously shaping their decision at the time. The Cantonese films made by these Chinese Americans give us an invaluable chapter that has remained elusive for the history books.

## Conclusion

Jue again returned to Hong Kong at the end of 1948 and put himself back in the game. Up until Grandview ceased production in 1954, he had made more than 20 films in Hong Kong dealing with subjects that bear no relation to Chinese in the US. In the



years after his return to the US in 1954 until his death in 1987, he had not pursued his filmmaking business further. The Cantonese films made in the US, which translated the changing moods and sentiments of Chinese immigrants into cinematic images, were long forgotten. By referencing the scant amount of surviving films and textual material, this article has attempted to elucidate Grandview's filmmaking production in the US while giving a preliminary analysis of the changing cultural identity of Chinese in the US as reflected in the films. But due to the very limited availability of primary source material, this largely unexplored chapter of film history will require further studies and research. [Translated by Agnes Lam]

Han Yanli received her PhD from Kyoto University, Japan. She is now an associate professor at Kwansei Gakuin University. Her research interests focus on the history of Japanese and Chinese cinemas.

Gratitude is owed to Law Kar without whose collection of precious material this essay would not have been completed.

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## Notes

1. Alan Gevinson (ed), *American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States: Within Our Gates: Ethnicity in American Feature Films, 1911–1960*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
2. Richard Springer, 'Saga of a Little-known Chinese American Film Pioneer: Joseph Sunn Jue', *East/West News*, 11 June 1987.
3. Kwan Man-ching, *Unofficial History of the Chinese Silver Screen*, Hong Kong: Wide Angle Press, 1976, p.134–135 (in Chinese).
4. Wood Moy, 'Light! Camera! Take!', *East Wind*, Dec 1947, p.20.
5. Ren Guixiang, *The Second Tide of Chinese Overseas Patriotism*, Beijing, Beijing Zhonggong Dangshi Ziliao Chubanshe, 1989, p.32 (in Chinese).
6. Joseph Sunn Jue, 'Why Did I Make *The Light of Overseas Chinese*', *The Light of Overseas Chinese* film brochure, Hong Kong: Grandview Film Company, 1940.
7. All existing Chinese and English materials on Grandview came up with the conclusion that their colour productions shot in the US during the WWII were subsequently shipped to Hong Kong for release after the war. But the author's own research revealed them all to be post-war productions, with their years of release in the US given in this article.
8. Zeng Ruiyan, *Overseas Chinese and the Anti-Japanese War*, Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, p.290, 1988 (in Chinese).
9. The Chinese Historical Society of America (ed), *A Pictorial of Chinese American History*, San Francisco: The Chinese Historical Society of America, 2001.
10. *The Lovers' Reunion* was premiered at the Grandview Theatre in San Francisco on 23 December 1946 and in Hong Kong on 13 February 1947.

# 被遺忘的影壇女先鋒

## Re-discovering Pioneering Females in Early Chinese Cinema

03.2014

香港的早期的電影圈，不乏具前瞻性、果敢、和創意的女性先鋒，這次選映的四部「女性」電影各有其背景和國度，既有跨界色彩，亦皆涉獵被遺忘已久的女性影人。其中人稱「霞哥」的伍錦霞自三十年代起年方二十已進軍電影行業，可惜她在港拍攝的電影大多不復存在，幸好有心的研究者鍥而不捨的毅力，走訪美國各省尋珍，花掉不少精力來完成《金門銀光夢》（2013）這部紀錄片，2013年在香港國際電影節首映後，身兼編、導、剪接的魏時煜再重新配對白、反覆修訂，成為這次放映的精雕版本。另一位女導演是長期協助侯曜導演的尹海靈，她自三十年代已在侯曜身邊協助編劇，間或當聯合編導，原以為她編導的作品都散佚了，卻在中國電影資料館覓得《海外征魂》這部戰後在新加坡拍攝的國語片，實屬難能可貴。除此之外，資料館新近的一批重要搜羅中，由美國運回十多部戰前的硝酸片，其中最早的一部是李綺年主演的《女性之光》（1937），這部電影的出土，不單讓我們首次看見李綺年活動的影像，更為我們了解三十年代的粵語片製作提供了重要的線索。把焦點移到美國，我們再發現Marion Wong這位美裔華人，竟於1916年已拍攝了劇情長片《關武帝》，更有幸後人留存了35分鐘左右的片段，也一併在這章節和香港觀眾重溫。



## 座談會 Seminar

### 華語電影之先鋒女性

#### Pioneering Female Filmmakers in Hong Kong and Overseas

講者Speakers：魏時煜 S. Louisa Wei、法蘭賓 Frank Bren、游靜 Yau Ching

日期及時間 Date & Time：8.3.2014（六Sat）4:30pm

粵語及英語主講 Conducted in Cantonese & English

### 重見天日的《關武帝》(1916)

#### Rediscovery of The Curse of Quon Gwon (1916)

講者Speaker：余競存 Professor Gregory Yee Mark

（電影女主角的後人 Grandson of the film's female lead, Violet Wong）

主持Host：傅慧儀 Winnie Fu

日期及時間 Date & Time：23.3.2014（日Sun）3:15pm 英語主講 Conducted in English

Even in the early days of Chinese cinema, we were not lacking in female pioneers who were bold and creative in initiating film projects. We have chosen four films to showcase these female talents, each with a unique background and perspective.

One of the first female directors in Hong Kong, Esther Eng joined the film industry at the young age of 20 in the 1930's. Though not many of her films survive, the hard work of researchers managed to uncover enough information for the feature-length documentary *Golden Gate Girls*. After its world premiere at the Hong Kong International Film Festival, S. Louisa Wei – who directed, wrote and edited the film – created a new cut of the film with new voiceovers.

Wan Hoi-ling is a long-time collaborator of director Hou Yao. Starting out as Hou's scriptwriter in the 1930's, Wan also co-directed Cantonese-language films with Hou and Hung Chung-ho. Her films were believed to have been lost, but we were able to obtain a print of Mandarin-language film *Spirit of Overseas Chinese*, shot in Singapore, from the China Film Archive.

Furthermore, the HKFA was also able to obtain over ten nitrate prints of pre-war films from the United States, the earliest one being *The Light of Women* (1937), starring Lee Yin-nin. Not only does it show us one of Lee's earliest works, it also helped us understand the filmmaking process of 1930's Cantonese-language films. We also discovered that a Chinese-American female director named Marion Wong directed a film named *The Curse of Quon Gwon*, believed to be the first Chinese-American film ever made. 35 minutes of footage from the film were recovered, and it will be screened to Hong Kong audiences for the first time.



# 金門銀光夢

## Golden Gate Girls

導演：魏時煜 製片：羅卡、魏時煜

2013 彩色 DCP 英語及粵語 中文字幕 90分鐘

Dir: S. Louisa Wei Prod: Law Kar, S. Louisa Wei

2013 Colour DCP English & Cantonese Chi Subtitles 90min

香港首位女導演是美國三藩市華僑，更是一名開誠布公的女同志。伍錦霞（1914-1970）一生特立獨行敢作敢為，誠然是真正的時代先驅。她的電影事業跨越中美，經歷了二次大戰等巨變，為中美兩國的華人觀眾創作了11部粵語片——荷里活一部、香港五部、加州三部、夏威夷一部、紐約一部。李小龍更在她的《金門女》（1941）初登銀幕，扮演一名襁褓女嬰。本片導演從中英兩語的文獻搜羅資料，並選取伍氏兩部現存影片的片段、其餘八部作品的劇照海報、六本私人相簿的照片、大量三藩市新聞片及珍藏影像，以豐富的素材重塑她的生平與她身處的烽火年代。當年的女性影壇先鋒穿梭遊走於東西兩極，衝破語言、文化、種族、性別的種種藩籬。2014年正好是伍錦霞誕生一百周年，本片特意向她致敬。

Hong Kong's first woman director was a San Francisco native and an open lesbian. Esther Eng (1914-1970) was a true pioneer in many senses. She made 11 Cantonese language films—one in Hollywood, five in Hong Kong, three in California, one in Hawaii and one in New York—all for Chinese audiences before, during and after WWII. She gave Bruce Lee his screen debut in his role as a baby girl in her 1941 film *Golden Gate Girl*. Drawing on the marks she left in both the Chinese and English press, this film begins to recover some of her lost stories. Clips from her two surviving films, stills and posters from her other eight motion pictures, photos from her six personal albums, newsreels of San Francisco as she saw them, as well as hundreds of archival images are all collected to present her life and the tumultuous time in which she lived in a stunning display of visuals. *Golden Gate Girls* is not just a biographical portrait of Esther Eng; it is also a tribute to pioneer women filmmakers working on both sides of the Pacific, and the courage with which they crossed boundaries of language, culture, race and gender. This screening is particularly meaningful as it falls on the 100th birth anniversary of Esther Eng.

8/3 2:30pm, 16/3 2:30pm\*

\* 設映後談，講者羅卡

Post-screening talk with Law Kar



## 女性之光

### The Light of Women

導演：高梨痕 編劇：莫明霞 出品：南洋

演員：李綺年、鄺山笑、梁添添、黃楚山、陶三姑

1937 黑白 DCP 粵語 83分鐘

Dir: Ko Lei-hen Scr: Mok Ming-ha

Prod Co.: Nanyang Film Company

Cast: Lee Yi-nin, Kwong Shan-siu, Leong Tim-tim,

Wong Cho-shan, To Sam-ku

1937 B&W DCP Cantonese 83min

李綺年飾演追求獨立自主的女性陸慕貞，本生長在鄉間，兩番談婚嫁都不如意，先是哥哥為錢逼她下嫁工廠老闆當妾侍，她為逃婚而避走到鄰邑另覓新生活，在那裏，她遇上喜歡的情郎（鄺山笑），滿以為自由戀愛會得幸福，但最後才發覺郎君是個懦弱無能之徒，於是決斷地帶着養女秀華（梁添添）離開，含辛茹苦的把女兒帶大，更開辦職業學校，教養窮家子弟。影片題旨清晰地描寫女性為抗惡勢力的壓迫（包括兄長的虐待和花花公子的玩弄），堅決奮鬥和自食其力的意志。影片自三十年代運往三藩市唐人街公映後，一別七十多載才重新被發現，今年始得戲院老闆方創傑先生同意捐贈給資料館作永久保存。影片的聲畫都因年代久遠而欠佳，但喜見三十年代已活躍的演員如李綺年、黃楚山、陶三姑等年輕又自信的演技，雖然節奏感和對白的演繹都見生硬，但劇本還算紮實。

After two relationships that failed to lead to marriage, Luk Mo-jing (Lee Yi-nin) moves to a nearby town to escape from being married off to a rich factory owner. In her new life, she finally meets a man she loves, only to discover that he, too, is an incompetent coward. With her adopted daughter Sau-wah (Leong Tim-tim) in tow, Mo-ying establishes a vocational school for children from poor families. Showing the harsh obstacles that face a woman in 1930's Chinese society, the film depicts a new generation of women who believe in free will and independence. It also gives us a chance to see legendary actors like Lee yi-nin, Wong Cho-shan and To Sam-ku at work. The film's pacing and dialogue can be somewhat stilted at times, but the strong story and a solid script make up for the shortcomings. After its screenings in San Francisco's Chinatown, the film was lost for 70 years until it was recently recovered. Theater owner Jack Lee Fong has generously agreed to donate the rare nitrate print of the film for permanent keeping at the HKFA, and it has now made its way to Hong Kong for the audience.

8/3 7:30pm\*, 22/3 7:30pm

\* 設映後談，講者黃愛玲

Post-screening talk with Wong Ain-ling



## 海外征魂

### Spirit of Overseas Chinese

導演／編劇：尹海靈 攝影：秦民勤

監製：繆康義、林振聲 出品：中華電影製片廠

演員：侯玉、馮濤、陳楓、馮鳳

1946 黑白 D Beta 國語 95分鐘

Dir/Scr: Wan Hoi-ling Prod: Miu Hong-nee, Lam Chun-sing

Cast: Hou Yu, Feng Tao, Chen Feng

1946 B&W D Beta Mandarin 95min

這是香港影人海外足跡的珍貴紀錄，仿似尹海靈以虛構的劇情片訴說她和知己侯曜的傳奇。日本侵華戰爭開始後，一對青年兄妹從內地投奔新加坡的舅父，他們感化民族意識薄弱的表弟參與抗戰。影片痛陳戰爭的傷害，亦感慨中華民族寄居海外的狀況。華人久離祖國，國族感情逐漸淡化；富裕子弟生活優悠，接受殖民地教育，愈為崇拜西方，很容易漠視祖國的厄難。影片利用對白中國語、英語的矛盾，及人物的取向和變化表現這種憂慮。此固然是華夏本位的看法，或者是尹海靈在當地生活多年的觀察。同一時期，中國電影也憶述抗戰經歷，但意識形態或主義的觀點漸多，《海外征魂》描寫簡單的個人投入，反映文化危機，又是一面純淨的光景。本片是尹海靈現今唯一可見的個人編導作品，她的合作夥伴侯曜在二戰時期的新加坡遇難，尹海靈的蹤跡則尚不詳，但勝利後她便在當地拍攝本片，由同是戰前往星洲拍攝電影的繆康義監製。戰後製作條件不佳，但幾乎全片實景拍攝，外景均作現場收音，殊不簡單。

Soon after the Sino-Japanese war broke out, two siblings escape from China to their uncle in Singapore. There, they manage to stir up their apathetic cousin's patriotic spirit and convince him to join the war effort. One of the first depictions of the Chinese diaspora by a Hong Kong director, director Wan Hoi-Ling shows the problem of overseas Chinese whose ethnic spirits have weakened due to their years abroad. Living a luxurious life under a foreign education system, these immigrants have come to lose sight of the crisis in their homeland. Wan chooses to approach a cultural issue from a micro perspective, highlighting the plight of the individual rather than an entire nation and making the story easier for audiences to connect to. Though the conditions of Singapore after the war were not ideal for filming, Wan was able to shoot most of the film on location.

鳴謝中國電影資料館 Screening Courtesy of the China Film Archive

15/3 7:30pm



## 關武帝

## The Curse of Quon Gwon

導演／編劇：Marion Wong 音樂：Judy Rosenberg重新配樂

1916 黑白 D Beta (轉自16毫米安全片)

無聲 35分鐘 (缺本)

Dir/Scr: Marion Wong

Music: new score composed by Judy Rosenberg

1916 B&amp;W D Beta (restored from 16mm safety film) Silent 35min (Incomplete)

攝於1916年，這部先鋒性的劇情片不但被譽為首部美籍華人拍攝的電影，更難得的是，身兼編、導、演的竟是位充滿藝術細胞的前衛女性Marion Wong。她攝製此片時才21歲，根據當年的報導，她意圖拍攝一部中國人的電影，並從而把一些中國傳統習俗介紹給西方世界。由於全長七卷的長片只留存得兩卷合共35分鐘片段，而且插入字幕全缺，但憑留下的影像可想像《關武帝》的故事圍繞新婚夫婦的西化行為，處處與傳統的中國習俗不咬弦，令她受盡委屈，最後被逐出家門，直至丈夫回家才能與家人和幼女重聚。這部影片的搜羅和發現經過也很傳奇。1916年留下的35毫米硝酸片，一直存放在女主角Violet Wong家中地庫，早被家人遺忘，直到1968年Violet孫子余競存把影片轉為16毫米的安全片。2004年經電影製作曾奕田奔走聯繫，這部電影在2005年經由美國影藝學院電影資料館修復，並於2006年被列入美國國會圖書館國家影片登記冊。余競存先生將在兩場放映後和觀眾分享這部電影的內容和他的家族歷史，從而了解這部片的跨界文化脈絡。

Acknowledged as the first Chinese-American film ever made, this 97-year-old production is a well-crafted love drama that was scripted, directed and produced by a talented film pioneer named Marion Wong, who also acted as the villainess in the film. She brought with her an entire Chinese cast from her family circle with her sister-in-law Violet Wong playing the female lead. She played a newly-wed wife whose westernised dress up and behavior clashed strongly with the traditional Chinese customs, and was cast out of the family and only reunited with her husband after much sufferings. The film was made in 1916 in Oakland with 35mm nitrate stock and was kept at Violet's cellar until it was allotted to the care of Violet's grandson Gregory Yee Mark in 1968. Only two reels of the 7-reel production survived and all intertitles were lost. With the help of filmmaker Arthur Dong, the film was rediscovered and restored in 2005 by the Academy Film Archive. It was also chosen in 2006 as one of the entries on the Library of Congress' National Film Registry. Gregory Yee Mark will be present to talk about the history and cultural essence of the film and his family.

鳴謝美國影藝學院電影資料館

Screening Courtesy of the Academy Film Archive

21/3 7:30pm\*, 23/3 2:30pm

\* 設映後談，講者余競存

Post-screening talk with Gregory Yee Mark



# 大觀公司的越洋製作

## Grandview's Cross-border Productions

03.2014

大觀影片公司的創立人趙樹榮五歲便移居美國，自小醉心電影製作，於1933年7月正式成立大觀公司，乘着有聲電影的開發期，打開製作粵語有聲片的門路，更邀得當年赴美巡迴演出的新靚就（即關德興）擔演公司創業作《歌侶情潮》（1933）。1934年後，趙樹榮看中粵語片在亞洲電影市場的潛力，決定來港大展拳腳，自1934至1940年間共拍片六十餘部。1939年底，因逃避戰亂而重返美國，在三藩市以「大觀美國分廠」的名義繼續製作粵語片。截至1948年的十年間，攝製影片達三十多部。這些電影多取材居華華人的故事，既展現華僑們在海外謀生的奮鬥史，亦透露當時海外華人的身份認同問題和對祖國的矛盾情結。可惜這些電影現存的拷貝不多，這次把本館搜羅得的五部大觀於美國攝製的影片，再加上戰後回港拍攝的首部彩色作品《連生貴子》（1948）。選片中的四部都運用了當年尖端的彩色拍攝技術，以飽和度高的特藝七彩拍攝，今日再看，可窺見當年海外華僑東西文化結合的獨特生活風貌。



Grandview Film's founder Joseph Sunn Jue (aka Chiu Shu-sun) moved to the United States at the age of five and has longed to make films at an early age. In July, 1933, Jue founded Grandview in hopes of creating Cantonese talkies. He even recruited Kwan Tak-hing, who was touring in the United States at the time, to star in *Romance of the Songsters* (1933), the studio's inaugural film. Seeing the potential popularity of Cantonese cinema in Asia, Jue came to Hong Kong and produced 60 films between 1934 and 1940. After returning to the United States in late 1939 to escape the war, Jue continued making Cantonese films in Grandview's San Francisco "U.S. branch." In the ensuing decade, Grandview produced an additional 30-odd films, all about the struggles of Chinese people working overseas, their identity crisis and their complex feelings for their homeland. Unfortunately, only a few of these films have survived the test of time. The Hong Kong Film Archive is screening five U.S.-produced Grandview films, as well as *A Baby for Everybody* (1948), the company's first color film produced in Hong Kong after the war. Four of the films in the program were produced in Technicolor, giving audiences a colorful glimpse of life as a Chinese immigrant living overseas.



## 光明之路

### The Way to Brightness

導演／編劇：蔣子祺 攝影：蔭榮 監製：趙樹榮

出品：大觀聲片有限公司（美國分廠）

主演：黃超武、黃鶴聲、梁碧玉、周坤玲、陸雲飛、張新月

1946 黑白 D Beta 粵語 95分鐘

Dir/Scr: Chiang Tsi-kei

Prod: Joseph Sunn Jue Prod.Co: Grandview (U.S. Branch)

Cast: Wong Chiu-mo, Wong Hok-sing, Leung Bik-yuk,  
Chow Kwun-ling, Luk Wan-fei, Cheung Sun-yuet

1946 B&W D Beta Cantonese 95min

本電影攝於第二次大戰日本戰敗之後，故事以兩個同母異父、分開長大而互不相識的兄弟張生（黃超武）和陳卓（黃鶴聲）為軸心，寫他們長大後愛上同一個女孩林紫蘭（周坤玲）而引起的爭執和鬧劇。透過一個改嫁母親，遙遙暗喻一份雖然身在外地但仍魂繫祖國的情懷。後來兄弟相認，血濃於水的情義更把恩仇在一瞬間化解。最後張生連兒女私情都放下，隻身向著「光明之路」出發，充分表現對未來的一份浪漫遐想。電影以張生作為國家新世代的代表，雖貧而不恥，雖勢弱而不卑，劇情處理對他充滿憐憫和表揚，亦透過他的發奮圖強鼓勵年輕一代要有志向，以達成一個男女平權的文明社會。海外華僑對祖國的復興懷有一定的期望，自己未能回鄉但亦盼望下一代能繼承回國為民族貢獻的願望。

Made after Japan's surrender in World War II, the film centers on the relationship between Cheung Sang (Wong Chiu-mo) and Chan Cheuk (Wong Hok-sing), two half-brothers who grew up apart without knowing about each other's existence. The two becomes nemesis as adults when they fall for the same woman. However, the two are able to put away matters of the heart and reconcile as family when they discover that they share the same blood. The melodramatic saga is actually a thinly veiled allegory for the situations of overseas Chinese. Sang serves as the representative of a new generation, fighting against poverty with his head held high to bring about a new civilized society with equality for all. The film also reflects the hope of overseas Chinese who wished to see their homeland revitalised so that the next generation can return and contribute to the development of the nation.

1/3 7:30pm



## 黑市夫妻 又名《吾友之妻》

### Black Market Couple

導演：蔣偉光

攝影：蔭榮 監製：趙樹榮

出品：大觀聲片有限公司（美國分廠）

主演：黃鶴聲、梁碧玉、廖奇偉、鄧培

1947 黑白 D Beta 粵語 80分鐘

為爭取假期而向老闆訛稱剛結婚並要度蜜月的黃文彬（黃鶴聲），竟向好友陳志偉（廖奇偉）借妻子阿玉（梁碧玉）來「頂包」，經一番隱瞞和錯摸後，文彬的假期固然苦不堪言，更害得好友差點被人誤會為姦夫。彬及時行樂的性格，正好反映中國內戰頻仍之際，偏安於三藩市或羅省的海外僑民嘗試溶入當地尋求生活的特性；此片明顯脫離了大時代的沉重感，換以輕鬆的心情面對步入新時代、新文明。黃鶴聲和廖奇偉是大觀的基本小生，演起喜劇來也算頭頭是道，一個滑頭，一個蠢直，令無傷大雅的劇情進展有種親切的喜感。蔣偉光導演把故事聚焦在大城市的洋房、美酒，酒店、報館及遊樂場，觀眾看到一幅中國人如何適意地融入美國生活的新景象。

As civil war waged on in China after World War II, overseas Chinese truly began to carve out a new life in the United States. This light comedy reflects the people's departure from heavy longing to an optimistic view of a new era. To secure a vacation for himself, Wong Man-bun (Wong Hok-sing) lies to his boss about a fake wedding and a fake honeymoon. What's worse is that Man-bun asks his good friend Chan Chi-wai (Liu Kei-wai) to let his wife Yuk (Leung Bik-yuk) to play the role of the wife! Grandview troupe actors Wong Hok-sing and Liu Kei-wai show off their comedy chops in this lighthearted farce, playing two very different, but equally silly characters. Setting the film in American hotel rooms, offices and theme parks, director Chiang Wai-kwong shows audiences how a new generation of Chinese has begun to truly adapting to a new American life.

2/3 5:30pm



## 海角情鴛

### Eternal Love

導演／編劇：蔣偉光

攝影：蔭榮 監製：趙樹榮

出品：大觀聲片有限公司（美國分廠）

主演：黃超武、周坤玲、陸雲飛、鄧培

1947 彩色 D Beta 粵語 81分鐘

Dir/Scr: Chiang Wai-kwong

Prod: Joseph Sunn Jue Prod.Co: Grandview (U.S. Branch)

Cast: Wong Chiu-mo, Chow Kwun-ling,

Luk Wan-fei, Tang Pui

1947 Colour D Beta Cantonese 81min

抗戰軍人黃寄鴻（黃超武）在戰場上失憶後與療養院的護士李美娟（周坤玲）共墮愛河，二人結為夫婦後鴻因不堪外父的冷言而決定到大城市尋找機會，但鴻剛抵埗即遇上車禍。意外令鴻憶起戰前往事卻忘了妻兒，娟於是隻身前往尋夫，卻以為鴻寡情薄義只好傷心離開。最終鴻憑一曲記起和娟的快樂時光。日軍戰敗後祖國局勢依然動盪，打碎了不少華僑回鄉之夢，加上美國在戰後對華人的政策放寬，本片頗能反映新一代華僑在身份認同上試圖另覓出路，放開懷抱在美尋找新天地。最後一個鏡頭看到一家人團聚並坐車登上金門大橋，美國夢在這裏發揮得淋漓盡致。主角的失憶，彷彿告訴大家「往事如煙」，片中更重覆唱頌「人生何處不是家」，歸國的意懷只能如鬼魅般透過歌曲寄意。

Made at times of turmoil in China after the end of World War II and the United States' relaxation in immigration policy, this melodrama actually implies that finding a new home abroad may not be such a bad thing after all. After losing his memory on the battlefield, Kei-hung (Wong Chiu-mo) falls in love with nurse Mei-kuen (Chow Kwun-ling). Spurred on by his father-in-law's cold attitude, Kei-hung takes off to the big city to find a job. However, he encounters a car accident that brings back his wartime trauma, but takes away his memories of Mei-kuen. In the end, one song helps Kei-hung remember his loving wife, and we see the reunited lovers driving off on the Golden Gate Bridge as a family. Here, memories are seen as the hope for returning home, though it's also something that can suddenly disappear into the wind. It's a bittersweet message that also encourages overseas Chinese to look ahead to the future instead of longing for a land they no longer feel secure.

9/3 2:30pm



## 金粉霓裳

### White Powder and Neon Lights

導演／編劇：黃金印（即黃鶴聲）

攝影：蔭榮 監製：趙樹榮

出品：大觀聲片有限公司（美國分廠）

主演：黃鶴聲、梁碧玉、陸雲飛、鄧培、廖奇偉

1947 彩色 D Beta 粵語 94分鐘

Dir/Scr: Wong Kam-yan (aka Wong Hok-sing)

Prod: Joseph Sunn Jue Prod.Co: Grandview (U.S. Branch)

Cast: Wong Hok-sing, Leung Bik-yuk,  
Luk Wan-fei, Tang Pui, Liu Kei-wai

1947 Colour D Beta Cantonese 94min

紅伶晚霞（梁碧玉）到三藩市大觀戲院登台並大受歡迎，可惜卻沉迷於大城市的財色酒氣以致頻頻失場，戲院更因此面臨倒閉。當晚霞發覺追求她的富家子手段卑劣地公報私仇後，下定決心改過前非，更決心幫助戲院重振聲威。大觀老闆趙樹榮不惜工本，以當年最尖端的特藝七彩技術拍攝本片，一方面拍出三藩市的歌舞昇平，另一方面推崇祖國的傳統戲曲藝術，在最後一場戲中戲《徐文廣陸地行舟》中，以新的表現手法呈現舊有的戲曲，可惜歌曲部份聲帶損壞嚴重，不復原貌。此外影片仍不忘向在外華人提出教化，透過晚霞這一角色從迷失到醒覺的經歷告誡觀眾別只顧玩樂而忘記努力。最後眾人都願意放下一己私利，為挽救戲班合力演出，暗喻華人生活雖苦亦必須同舟共濟的精神。

Opera singer Man-ha (Leung Bik-yuk) is the hugely popular star of San Francisco's Grandview Theater. However, her fame becomes her downfall as she drowns herself in various big city vices, and her constant absence causes the theater to face bankruptcy. When she discovers the wicked scheme of a rich man who was trying to court her, Man-ha decides to mend her ways and save the theater. Filmed in San Francisco with state-of-the-art Technicolor technology, the film splendidly captures the beauty of both the modern city and the traditional art of Chinese opera. Through Man-ha, the film teaches the audience not to become over-indulged in life. In the film, the characters are willing to sacrifice personal benefits for the good of the theater, bringing out a message about the need for overseas Chinese to stick together. The finale, featuring a fresh new twist on a traditional opera song, is especially spectacular. Unfortunately, the sound tracks in some of the opera scenes are damaged beyond repair.

15/3 2:30pm

設映後談，講者易以剛

Post-screening talk with Jack Ng



## 狂風逐燕飛

### A Strong Wind Banishes the Swallow

導演／編劇：趙樹榮

攝影：趙樹榮 監製：趙樹榮

出品：大觀聲片有限公司（美國分廠）

主演：麗兒、鄧培、廖奇偉、趙文輝、黃金龍

1948 彩色 D Beta 粵語 86分鐘

Dir/Scr: Joseph Sunn Jue

Prod: Joseph Sunn Jue Prod.Co: Grandview (U.S. Branch)

Cast: Lai Yee, Tang Pui, Liu Kei-wai,

Chiu Man-fai, Wong Kam-lung

1948 Colour D Beta Cantonese 86min

少梅（麗兒）和國興自小青梅竹馬，住在農莊以務農維生，可是梅的姑母卻迫梅下嫁有錢地主鄧劍豪（鄧培）。梅為逃避婚事決隻身前往三藩市謀生，後得傳（廖奇偉）和龍幫忙接走弟弟，之後三人更頂手經營餐室。豈料餐室的業主竟是鄧，鄧為向梅報復於是決定收回舖位。故事中梅和姑母的兩代角力十分鮮明，上一代的勢利與專橫成為揶揄的對象，相反梅成為了新時代女性的標誌，她那份追求個人自由的果敢正好代表新一代希望從傳統觀念中蛻變成獨立個體的心聲。開咖啡店、吃西餅慶生日、在教堂裏行婚禮等西化生活，對當時香港觀眾而言是「開眼界的時髦事情」。場景的佈置亦經過悉心設計，華人在海外的起居及生活環境，已看不見傳統中式的擺設，取而代之是西化的擺設及裝飾。

When her aunt forces her to marry rich landlord Kim-ho (Tang Pui), farm girl Siu-mui (Lai Yee) flees to San Francisco. With the help of two locals, Siu-mui finds a new life as the co-operator of a restaurant. However, their business is in jeopardy when they discover that their landlord is Kim-ho, who decides to take back the restaurant as revenge. Siu-mui and her aunt create a contrast between two generations of women: the old sees wealth and power as ultimate goal in life, while the new strives for personal freedom and independence. At the time of its release, Hong Kong audiences noted director Joseph Sunn Jue's depiction of overseas Chinese integrating into life in the United States, with cafes, church weddings and other Americanisms replacing symbols of a traditional Chinese lifestyle.

16/3 7:30pm



## 連生貴子

### A Baby for Everybody

導演／編劇：黃金印（即黃鶴聲）

攝影：羅君雄 剪接：蔭榮

監製：趙樹榮 製片：趙樹芹

出品：大觀聲片有限公司

主演：張瑛、白雪仙、林坤山、李小紅、黃楚山、大口何

1948 彩色 D Beta 粵語 91分鐘

Dir/Scr: Wong Kam-yan (aka Wong Hok-sing)

Prod: Joseph Sunn Jue Prod.Co: Grandview

Cast: Cheung Ying, Pak Suet-sin,  
Lam Kwun-shan, Lee Siu-hung,  
Wong Cho-shan, Tai-hau Ho

1948 Colour D Beta Cantonese 91min

本片是大觀港廠重開後開拍的首部彩色製作，本來是一對有情人嚴富（張瑛）和翠環（白雪仙）因嚴家的阻撓而引起連串誤會，但劇情的推展很快便被演活「孤寒財主」的林坤山「搶晒鏡」。這位刻薄成性的地主嚴倉，一方面為了省錢竟然拒絕成全姪兒的大好婚事，另一方面又強行逼村女玉嬋嫁到嚴家作妾。最後翠環聯同倉妻設計救出婢之餘更好好教訓倉一番。同樣是有關年青人力求擺脫上一代控制的題材，本片比起《狂風逐燕飛》更為輕鬆惹笑，長輩再次成為被取笑人物，但嚴富的角色設計比前作的姑母更加滑稽。大觀恢復港廠後的製作，無論故事、選角及劇種都重新組合，以適應戰後香港的新市場。

The first production after the re-opening of Grandview's Hong Kong branch, Wong Hok-sing's boisterous comedy is another film about generational conflict. The film starts off as a story about the obstacles facing young lovers Yim Fu (Cheung Ying) and Tsui Wan (Pak Suet-sin), but Lam Kwun-shan's petty, tyrannical landlord Yim Chong eventually takes the spotlight. Not only does Yim Chong reject Yim Fu's marriage to save money, he tries to force a young local girl to become his concubine. In the end, Wan and Chong's wife devise a clever scheme to teach the villainous landlord a lesson, and true love prevails. The studio once again delves into the familiar theme of the young generation fighting to escape the grip of the older generation, but the new cast and genre choices also shows a real effort by Grandview to integrate into the Hong Kong market after all those years away.

23/3 7:30pm





# 香港早期電影遊蹤 Early Cinematic Experience of Hong Kong

## 第三冊 被遺忘的影壇女先鋒及 大觀公司的越洋製作

Book III Re-discovering Pioneering Females  
in Early Chinese Cinema &  
Grandview's Cross-border Productions

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香港西灣河鯉景道50號 50 Lei King Road, Sai Wan Ho, Hong Kong

電話 Enquiries：(852) 2739 2139 傳真 Fax：(852) 2311 5229

電郵地址 E-mail：hkfa@lcsd.gov.hk 網址 Website：http://www.filmarchive.gov.hk



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