



Research on the Formation and Transformation of Cinema Public Sphere in Shanghai, 1890s-1930s

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博士論文

Research on the Formation and Transformation of Cinema

Public Sphere in Shanghai, 1890s-1930s

(1890年代～1930年代上海における映画公共圏の形成および
変遷)

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This dissertation is a rehistoricization of Shanghai film culture from the 1890s to the 1930s through the lens of the alternative public sphere and modernity. By doing so, I delineate the constitution and transformation of the film public sphere, which is a pluralistic and heterogeneous site of sensory reflexivity that generates modernity and publicity in the everyday life of the general public. My examples include the rise of the public sphere of film publishing in the context of Shanghai's literary culture (Chapter 1); the flourishing of the public sphere constituted by the moviegoing experience in relation to film production, exhibition, and consumption patterns (Chapter 2); and the expansion of the public sphere constructed by implications of the star system generated outside film texts and movie theaters (Chapter 3). As a historical project, my dissertation devotes three chapters to significant topoi of the film public sphere from the 1890s to 1930s and their articulations within selected scopes. Although the studies of these three scopes share an almost overlapping time frame, each had its own relatively independent and complete formation and development process.

Chapter 1 introduces the emerging film publishing industry in Shanghai, which intersected the traditional publishing industry, left-wing literary circles, the Neo-sensualist school, and the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school. Tracing the operation of vernacular modernity in these literary and publishing cultures, I examine their perceptual mode in producing public discourses and experience exchange through inflammatory emotions and radical behavior, novel sensual elements and material forms, and traditional values and ethnicity. Such novel interactions construct a public sphere with a hybrid subject of Chinese bourgeois citizens, the so-called small citizens, and the masses. Film publishing, as a public vision not only for dissemination but also for the local response to modernity, highlighted the multiple functions of the public sphere, ranging from conceptual renewal to rational dialogue and the adaptive rehearsal of modern society. At the same time, I examine how this public sphere played an important role in adapting cinema as a new art form. In so doing, I situate the introduction of cinema in China between what I term the hybrid style of "bourgeois" and "mass" tastes, locating it between literary and cinematic, rational and sensual, Western modernity and indigenous traditions.

Chapter 2 follows the development of the film industry and reconstructs the history of the activities and practices that materialized the projection venue as a public sphere. I trace the transition from "exhibitionistic early films" to "films of narrative integration" and "nude films"; the changing

configurations of production, exhibition, and consumption patterns; and the changing audience. Derived from various interests, the movie theater space first foregrounded the heterogeneous and contingent viewers' bodies in relation to technology, allowing them to recognize the world beyond boundaries through various exhibitionistic and sensational spectacles. Second, it promoted a more internalized cinematic experience accompanied by the formation of a place for political enlightenment and propaganda among intellectuals and the middle class. Third, the repopularized and externalized cinematic experience embraced a composite radical discourse of feminism and patriotism, enabling the general public to deal with social and political issues. I map an "oppositional public sphere" that traversed representation and reality with a mixture of sentimentality, exhibitionist techniques, and physical sensation that broke through the shackles of expression and action. This public sphere did not emerge from the confines of a serious "political revolution" or "highbrow" culture but was embedded in entertaining film experience, as I illustrate in the previous chapter. As a "playful, mimetic machine", cinema's rehabilitation of numbed nerves and alienated bodies enabled the collective reflexive experience of modernity.

Chapter 3 takes the sweep of fan culture as its point of departure to analyze the production of the proletarian public sphere with a new emphasis on reality. I reconstruct historical, concrete fans as practicing a particular mode of participation, discursive construction, and experience exchange from a less psychoanalytic and systematic perspective by treating the fan as a new social role and the empirical subject of the public sphere. I first examine the impact of stars who maintained intimate relationships with their fans in various aspects of ordinary life as both sensorial evocation and mass enlightenment for fans. Subsequently, stars gained social and cultural status, and the film industry began to exert its authority. These changes led to the rejection and criticism of affective immediacy and participatory fans. In this context, I further explore fans' interest in forming entertaining and critical organizations to, on the one hand, continue their self-enlightenment in conversation with authorities in the film industry and, on the other hand, to construct a mass discourse in relation to the supervision of these authorities and confrontation with them. Finally, as I illustrate the dialectic of revolutionary masses and entertainment fans, I outline a more radical and dramatic execution of political beliefs and revolutionary causes by fans and the general public with the emergence of movie stars as political leaders. The pioneering fans, together with the dazzling stars, acted as catalyst and amplifier, allowing a broader public to enter the scene and participate in

the configuration of the public sphere.

Although discussed at different scopes, the issue of female enlightenment is one of the central themes of my dissertation. It is no exaggeration to say that the modes of participation, the formal innovation of discursive construction and action, and the often chaotic elements such as sensory immediacy and material condition that characterized this female enlightenment are precisely the core qualities of “the proletarian public sphere”. These elements are also highly valued and shared by the “general masses”, such as working-class men who do not qualify as bourgeois citizens. Therefore, while I see these women’s enlightenment and activist practices as significant topoi in the landscape of modernity and the proletarian public sphere, I also address the practices of other ordinary people who did not become “self-disciplined subjects”.

Examining how new collective subjectivities and identities were constructed on and off screen, I delineate the new worldview and distinctive sociocultural and political influences produced by new semantics and practices that became part of everyday life. These forms of practice and communication broke all taboos of the classic public sphere, involving many links in the process of film production and consumption and renewing aspects of research on related matters, such as literary schools, space culture, and consumer culture. By reviewing these mass-mediated experiences and inclusive forms that traverse divergent genres and boundaries, I attempt to delineate an alternative genealogy of Chinese cinema to challenge existing unilinear versions of its evolutionary history.