This paper explores the final consolidation of Hong Kong's film industry in the 1930s, over thirty years after cinema was introduced to the colony, and twenty years after the first local film was made. A widely held view about Hong Kong's pre-war cinema is expressed in an essay by Hong Kong film writer Stephen Teo, who claims: "from the sources available, we know that a quite advanced film industry had developed by the 1930s as it recovered from the crippling effects of a general strike which began in June 1925 and lasted until October 1926 (the film industry took until 1929 to resume production of films)."[7]

While literature on these pioneering and conflict-ridden years remains scarce, such a view, also shared by Yu Mo-wan,[8] the territory's most prolific anecdotist on the local cinema, tends to look for continuity in the chain of events, and is based on an evolutionary model of historical progress - that is, once introduced, film should take root in the local material context of Hong Kong and follow a path of progress, whether by quantity of output or by degree of sophistication in its industrial organization. But these assumptions tend to isolate entrepreneurial attempts, thus privileging production output, and ignore the broader context of popular culture and the influence of colonial administrators and cultural elites. The period 1925-1929, of riots and their aftermath, may have provided a handy explanation for the distinct break from 1927 to 1930 when not one single film was made locally. But this discourse fails to explain why, after the first local film *Chuang Tzu tests his wife* (*Zhuang Zi shi qi*, Hong Kong 1913, immediately released in Los Angeles, USA), it took eleven long years for the next film *The calamity of money* (*Jing qian nie*, 1924) to be made and to appear in the local market.[9] The model of progress, too, is blind to the variations within the viewing public, which was highly receptive to foreign films until the 1930s, and yet did not seem to provide a strong enough cultural desire or market incentive for local production to mature despite a majority Chinese population.[10]

This paper examines in detail one portion of Hong Kong film history (the 1930s), by tracing the changes in public discourse related to the cinema. The city of Hong Kong, which had initially been seen positively by Chinese activists as their nation's outlet to the West and gateway into progress and modernity, soon acquired the far more ominous reputation as a cultural "desert" and a "slave" of colonial powers.[11] Embodied in this
transition is a switch of emphasis among China's progressive intellectuals from the pursuit of cultural Enlightenment via Westernization to a fiercely anti-colonial patriotic nationalism, largely after the May Fourth protests. It is precisely Hong Kong's fall from grace, I shall argue, that coincided with, and to some extent shaped, the emergence of the colony's film industry.

The dozens of films made in the early years of the decade (roughly between 1933 and 1935) can be examined as nodal points of a changing, complex social, cultural and textual network that moves in history. I share Toby Miller's view that cutting through individual cultural texts are different diachronic and synchronic discourses - that is, each film is a nexus of histories, social, factual or fictional. This essay, therefore, challenges the pre-supposition that everything of importance in the development of cinema necessarily originates from the institutional center of film production, giving priority to the filmmakers. My concern is beyond mere aesthetic and institutional history, nor would I confine myself to reception studies that perpetuate accounts of cinema as an ideological apparatus or examine a specific film's enunciative power. My essay raises questions about the intricate relations between the cinema and other domains of everyday life. And I would do so by invoking the notion of the public sphere, sharing Miriam Hansen's definition of this as a "critical concept that is itself a category of historical transformation." Cinema then is far more than a mere agency or a collection of representational practices: it constitutes a unique public sphere of its own, "defined by particular relations of representation and reception." It is the human subject, through various social practices, which is the crucial component of this distinct sphere. But that is not all. I would want to look at how, in 1930s Hong Kong, the film arena constituted an unprecedented public domain of leisure and entertainment - where the unstable Chinese population of Hong Kong congregated to re-define who they were, and to decide what kinds of loyalty they endorsed.

The term "public sphere" loosely refers to the multifarious social arenas where people come together every day as a public to purposefully, seriously or casually negotiate their interests and identities. The unique circumstances in early 20th century Hong Kong included the interaction between Chinese elites (both cultural and economic), British authorities, and the rest of Hong Kong's population in the public domain, and specifically the way these parties participated in the consumption of entertainment/leisure activities, including cinema, and the production of discourses about the social utility of recreation. Unpacking the myth of the 1930s as the "golden age" of leisure and pleasure, two forces were displayed in tension: first, the British colonial government's effort to achieve effective government, and second, the local Chinese population's effort to meet the obligation of being both legitimate colonial subjects and at the same time loyal Chinese patriots. The people of the colony were thus simultaneously interpellated as docile subjects of Empire and "responsible" citizens of the modern Chinese nation. British
authorities, Chinese capitalists, and local intellectuals developed a complex, multi-layered, and tension-ridden network of ideal models of "appropriate" conduct. For colonial rulers, the ideal conduct of the population was defined as a de-politicized compliance with the demands of social order. For local capitalists, appropriate behavior was defined as a hedonistic interest in leisure and consumption. For local cultural elites (especially writers whose voice was widely heard through local Chinese-language newspapers), there was the urgent need to articulate the problems of how to survive and conduct oneself properly in the new urban space. In these written debates, the negotiated paradigms often demonstrated unresolved conflicts between the desire to be modern (Western) and the anxiety about breaking traditional (Chinese) moral norms. According to Chinese patriots, the people ought to sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of the (Chinese) nation. In this context, the cinema functioned as a technology of power whereby different social groups struggled to control the way ordinary viewers would define their moral commitments, social identities, and everyday practices. Audiences were expected to negotiate a contradictory set of political and cultural imperatives, (re-)producing in the process a complicated culture plagued by inextricable tensions which it will be my task to unravel.

In brief, this essay will discuss how the film arena - a relatively fluid space in the beginning as well as a new conjuncture of group interests, power politics, social imperatives and invented tradition - was gradually turned into a space for surveillance by the rulers/elites, and an exploitable market for the Chinese capitalist. This discussion will subsequently address the formation of collective values and identities - which is not only a question of textual and inter-textual practices, but also how the drama of everyday public life induces a voluntary response to the call for proper citizenship.

The film arena in the 1930s

The first sign of the consolidation of the film industry in this decade was the birth of the Hong Kong Film Company and Lianhua Film Production and Printing Company in 1930, both of which were founded by experienced film entrepreneurs such as Li Beihai, Li Minwei and Luo Mingyou, who already had their share of interest in Shanghai and other mainland cities, together with top local business magnates and community notable such as Sir Robert Ho Tung and Hysan Lee. The latter provided the real estate (in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong Island) necessary for Lianhua to establish its film studio, which it did in 1931. Many smaller film companies and minor studios sprouted in the decade to come. In 1934, Overseas Lianhua published detailed plans to develop a new studio on the Kowloon side of Hong Kong to concentrate on sound film production. The board members were all prominent figures within the local Chinese community, such as: Ng Pak-to, owner of Central Theatre; Chan Chu, owner of Astor Theatre; well-known merchant Aw Boon-haw, manufacturer of the Tiger Balm medicinal ointment; Fung
Yiu-wing, Deputy Chief of the famous Fung Keung Rubber Manufacturing Co.; Tam Wun-tong, General Manager of Luen Tai Insurance Company; and Dr. R.H. Kotewall, lawyer, non-official Justice of Peace, and Member of the Legislative Council. The plan claimed a total area of over 300,000 square feet, and a successful collection of initial capital of $HK500,000 by July 1934.\textsuperscript{xii} In the same year, Lianhua also founded the colony's second film magazine, disseminating patriotic national sentiments as much as promoting film literacy and Lianhua's ideals in filmmaking.

Perhaps conveniently for an historian of this decade, milestones and stages of development that spanned over thirty years of American and European cinema history were compressed into one single decade in the colony's belated film culture boom: the transition from silent to part-sound and sound film, from black-and-white to part-colour, union organisation within the industry, the boom in movie theatre building, the development of film magazines and film pages in local newspapers, censorship problems and the involvement of the industry in politics and various forms of community or social pressure.

Up to 1929, there had been only ten feature films ever produced in the territory, six of which were released in 1925.\textsuperscript{xiii} Production then escalated, to an average of four films each year before 1934, to fifteen in the year 1934 alone, forty-four in 1936, and nearly double that in 1937. There were a total of four hundred and thirty-eight films made locally in the entire decade (1930-39), of which four hundred and four were feature films and thirty-four were documentaries.\textsuperscript{xiv} The 1930s had the highest yield of documentary films ever in the history of local commercial filmmaking. They were mainly filmic records of festivities, prominent commercial and sports activities, major celebrations such as the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of King George V's coronation, anti-Japanese propaganda featuring Chinese armies at war, and public gatherings of grass-root associations and community groups.\textsuperscript{xv}

While romance and folklore were common subject matter or the source of creative inspiration, a number of unique genres uncommon in the West gradually settled as the norms of the 1930s: didactic films full of explicit moral admonition, patriotic films (especially, after 1933, addressing the local audience's ethnic-national origins), and sword-play films (with their predecessors in sword-play literature and Chinese opera traditions). Of greater interest to investigators of this moment of filmmaking was the almost unnoticeable "growth" in the horror/fantasy genre - from one in 1934 (out of fifteen films made that year) to sixteen in 1939 (out of one hundred and twenty-five films) - which nonetheless drew the attention of the cultural elite who lobbied against them in the name of anti-superstition. Mainland writers, who claimed that Hong Kong's cinema was backward, often based their claim on this 12.8\% of films from the year 1939.\textsuperscript{xvi}

The one genre that topped the list of the 1930s was undoubtedly the song film. These
were films made more for the display of Cantonese songs than for dramatic plot, and their publicity material often featured the titles of the individual songs and the artists who performed them. Needless to say, many of the actors of these films were not originally movie stars but popular artists from the Cantonese song arena. With individual songs and artists singled out, these song films were turned into handy publicity vehicles for the records to be made immediately afterwards. This phenomenon indicates three important moves in the entertainment arena of the time. The first is the local record-producing business, flourishing since its consolidation in the 1920s, and the commercial linkage between local filmmaking and the record industry. Second is the final convergence of the multifarious modes and diverse traditions of Cantonese folk music into a new form, which coincided with the consolidation of a new group of leisure facilities for their public display: these were the daily broadcasting of Cantonese songs in the Chinese radio segments, the rise of herbal tea-houses that featured a radio delivering "free" Cantonese songs for customers, and the evening Cantonese song forums in Chinese restaurants which had started to flourish since the 1920s. The third strand is the "reformed Cantonese opera" movement in the 1930s - often also described as the modernization of Cantonese opera and billed as "new opera" [xin ju] in publicity literature - by which some Western instruments, especially the violin, were introduced to modernize the sound, and contemporary subject matters adapted to expand the repertoire. The connection between Cantonese opera and cinema was made explicit by Chan Fei-nung, the late artist who started out in Cantonese opera in the 1920s. He commented that "after 1925, in face of the novel, ever-changing motion pictures, and the audience's outcry to see something new, many within the Cantonese opera business rushed to do 'new opera'. Cinema and the "new opera" cross-bred and it was not uncommon to have both a movie and (new) opera version bearing the same title: two instances are The idiot's wedding night (Sha zai dongfang, movie made 1933, new opera 1934) and The twin sisters (Zi mei hua, both movie and new opera 1934).

In the midst of this development of new genres, however, were some less noticeable attempts to appropriate the relatively fluid space of filmmaking for more humanitarian concerns. 1934 was one brief year of democratic space. The fifteen local films released that year were shared roughly equally among a number of companies, most of them quite young: two films were produced by Guolian Film Company (Grand Motion Picture Company), one by Quanqiu Film Company, one by Nanyue Film Company, one by Asia Company [Yazhou Gongsix] and three by Huaiyi Film Company, whose master-mind, Sek Chung-shan, was the Chairman of the Catholic Youth Association and an experienced school teacher who sought to use this experience to advantage in movies. The voice of cultural leadership, too, found its representation in two almost brand new companies: Overseas Lianhua, founded 1934, made three films in Hong Kong; and Zhonghua Sound & Silent Movies Production Company, founded in Hong Kong in 1932 by the key personnel of Lianhua, contributed four films. Tianyi, founded in Shanghai in 1924 and...
with a Hong Kong branch started in 1935, was run by the Shaw family, ambitious Shanghai entrepreneurs and Lianhua’s keen competitors.

Judging from content summaries, two out of the sixteen films made in 1934 drew upon folk legends, and thirteen were in contemporary settings. The latter, with the exception of one with patriotic appeal, mostly concerned themselves with issues of survival - moral or material - in contemporary urban space. Although it is impossible to be conclusive about the exact content (because no prints survive from that period), movie ads, movie news and film reviews in newspapers almost uniformly represented the films to their audience with a social-ecological slant. Such a dialogue with contemporary everyday life, no matter how immature in form or how generic in locality and cultural specificity, indicated an attempt to turn cinema into a unique forum for the "local" and the "contemporary" - articulations that would be almost impossible in other arenas of cultural production. The Cantonese song and opera arena, for example, despite its modernization of facilities and form, was very much obsessed with Cantonese ethnic traditions (Hong Kong practically being part of the Guangdong culture in Southern China) - perhaps because it was the only possible way to preserve a regional identity (of Cantonese-ness) that had been silenced by other dominant "Chinese" as well as British-Hong Kong discourses.

Interestingly, the fear of going too far with modern ways found echoes every day in reports in local newspapers, where moral problems were represented both in the publicity news of movies and in reports of local news events. These two forms - both reliant to a large extent on family melodrama and romantic tragedy - were juxtaposed without clear demarcation. This was particularly obvious in the the newspaper Wah kiu yat po, in its "column pages", published regularly on pages 2 & 3 of Section IV. Page IV-2 included regular contributions of creative literary work, mainly in old Chinese and occasionally in contemporary Chinese. Page IV-3, carrying a daily editorial commentary on events of a cultural nature, was shared by news of recent creative work in Cantonese songs, theatre/film reviews, fashionable topics, recent moves of songstresses and movie stars, and free writing on daily life in general. These "column pages" provided discussions on topics such as how to handle romantic relations, what it meant for women to expose their bodies, how to be a well-respected young person, whether men and women should share the same swimming pool at the same time and so on. It is important to note that movie advertisements in Chinese-language newspapers in the 1930s were not just visual representation of the movies via blurbs and graphics: they were usually wordy and expository, and often played the role of review. Inter-textual referencing between the news reports and movie publicity deserves further research. It must be added, though, that compared to the more rhetorical nature of the newspaper reports, the movie publicity often shrewdly embraced commercial selling points while narrativising contemporary anxiety with a dose of "healthy"
messages.

As already mentioned, 1934 briefly afforded more room for humanitarian concern and visualization of the contemporary setting, free from domination by any single entrepreneur. But in 1935, immediately after Tianyi's founding of its Hong Kong branch, this space diminished. Huayi, the most enthusiastic group of young filmmakers and most sensitive to the "contemporary", disappeared altogether in 1935 after a three-film output in its one-year life span. Sek Yau-yu, its key director and actor, and student of Lianhua's training project, still appeared in one film in each of 1936 and 1939, but did not resume filmmaking until 1940 when he directed five films in two years for Grandview and Shehui [Society] Film Company. Overseas Lianhua's activities came to a halt in 1935.xxii After the entrance of Tianyi-Hong Kong (from Shanghai) and Grandview (from San Francisco), the local cinemas were suddenly flooded with Cantonese songs and opera on screen. Twenty-three out of thirty-two films made locally that year were song films. Ten out of these twenty-three films were made by Tianyi - which was also the total number of films that the company made with their Hong Kong resources that year. That year, Tianyi also beat its new competitor Grandview who made a total of only seven films. These song films used both contemporary and period settings, in the first year of full-sound film production in Hong Kong. In other words, the boom of Cantonese singing in the local cinema, on the one hand, coincided with and was fueled by the boom of Cantonese songs and opera that had gathered force since the 1920s, and, on the other hand, was a result of eager entrepreneurs, both from within the territory and also from outside, who could not wait to capitalize on the desires of a ready but unsaturated market. The take-off of the two magnate-newcomers, Tianyi and Grandview, signified the domination of commercial, market-driven interests. "Cantonese-ness" was exploited, and the Cantonese sound commodified. These companies tapped into the local people's need to acquire a more distinct, defined and unified "ethnic" identity. This identity is not only used to differentiate the Hong Kong-Chinese from the non-Chinese Hong Kong subjects, but also from the non-Hong Kong Chinese subjects. As a matter of fact, Hong Kong cinema in the 1930s was basically Cantonese: only thirteen films were made in Mandarin, around 1938 to 1940.

Cantonese films that featured special song numbers continued to be popular throughout the rest of the 1930s. There was only one film with a concern for contemporary issues in 1935, and the number went up again in 1936 to above ten (out of forty-nine films made). Films with a patriotic theme promoting the idea of national defence gradually increased towards the end of the decade.

The Cantonese arena

It may be tempting to assume that the people of Hong Kong were overjoyed to witness the final blossoming of their local filmmaking, or to hear their vernacular dialect finally
uttered in public spectacles. The critic might expect that the local people would applaud the efforts of young filmmakers like Sek Chung-shan or Sek Yau-yu's to articulate everyday grievances on their behalf. The reality was rather different. As the scanty film writings and movie ads of the time indicate, the key differentiation at that time was not whether a film was made locally or in China (mainly Shanghai). In fact, only on rare occasions would one find references to the "local" or "Hong Kong" in the movie ads of Wah kiu yat po, but when a film was made in Shanghai, it would be clearly specified as a "national film" [guo pian]. The Industrial & commercial daily press even went so far as to lump both Hong Kong and Shanghai films together into the same category of guo pian. In both newspapers, productions from Hong Kong, the mainland or any other place where they were produced and performed by Chinese, would be included within the term guo pian.

The key distinction was not local versus mainland, but Cantonese versus Mandarin. The first Cantonese sound and part-sound films were indeed made locally: The idiot's wedding night (Sha zai dongfang, 1933, Zhonghua Sound and Silent Movies Production Company), and Conscience (Liang xing, 1933, Zhonghua). But the first Cantonese sound films that really touched a nerve with the Hong Kong Cantonese audience were produced outside Hong Kong. The first were The white golden dragon (Bai jin lon, 1933, Tianyi-Shanghai), and The romantic tides of the singing couple (Ge lu qing chao, 1933, Grandview, San Francisco), both featuring plentiful Cantonese songs sung by popular stars in the Cantonese song arena. White golden dragon was released in Hong Kong movie theatres in 1933, and Romantic tides on 10 January 1934, both repeated in different theatres until late in 1934. A third crowd-pleaser, The romantic history of the song stage (Ge tai yan shi, 1934, Tianyi-Shanghai) opened in May 1934 at Central Theatre and stayed for a few months in other theatres. In the following year, another Shanghai competitor, Star (Mingxing) Film Company, learning from Tianyi, also sent in its first Cantonese song-film, The unofficial history of the red boat [Hong chuan wai shi] to test the Hong Kong market. The rise of the local cinema was discussed in the Chinese-language dailies. The Industrial & commercial daily press, for example, published an essay titled "Overseas Lianhua busy with sound film preparation" in the local news section which opened with this congratulatory statement:

In the past one year, the national film enterprise in Hong Kong has been like young bamboos sprouting after the rain in spring. Zhonghua, Huayi and so on were founded one after another. Even Tianyi came to set up its studio, and Lianhua, too, resumed the activities of its Hong Kong studio, actively engaged in film production.

The essay emphasises the mission of promoting local culture: however, although it
noted the blossoming of local filmmaking in Hong Kong, the rhetoric in general included Hong Kong as one arm of mainland Chinese filmmaking, making Hong Kong films one kind of guo pian. Another contribution to the discourse of the "rise of the local cinema" was a film review (in the "drama talk" section) in the column pages of Wah kiu yat po on the film Return from the battleground (Zhandi guilai, Guolian Film Company, 1934). Interestingly, the essay opened with similar wording to that in Industrial and commercial press, comparing recent Hong Kong filmmaking to "young bamboos sprouting after the rain in spring." Reflecting on the few worthy films that came out that year, the writer then described Return as demonstrating "strong consciousness," which was what people in times of turmoil needed. In conclusion, the film was congratulated for "not displaying a single line of romantic banality or the empty shouts of an angry young person," thus affirming implicitly the paradigm of a worthy local film.\textsuperscript{xxvi}

One characteristic I have noted during my research requires more in-depth investigation, but may be of interest in the context of this essay. A number of imported films from Shanghai, such as Struggle (Zhengzhua, 1933) and One female star (Yige numingxing, 1934), both produced by Tianyi-Shanghai, and The loss of love (Shilian, 1933, Star Film Company), were all billed as "full Cantonese dialogue.\textsuperscript{xxvii} However, all of the main actors in these films were not native speakers of Cantonese, nor did they have a record of residence in the Cantonese-speaking region, with the exception of Zhang Zhiyun, the female lead of The loss of love. One may compare these films to those produced by Tianyi-Hong Kong in which all main actors were local Cantonese-speaking people. The white gold dragon and Romantic history of the song stage, though produced in Shanghai, actually featured Hong Kong's most prominent Cantonese opera stars. A famous and well received Tianyi-Shanghai production, The little actress [Xiao nuling], was made in 1932 for the mainland audience with the then 15-year-old Yuan Meiyun as the lead. The film was not released in Hong Kong until 1934, when it was billed as a "Cantonese sound film" in its publicity statement.\textsuperscript{xxviii} One possible explanation would be that these films were made in Mandarin, then dubbed into Cantonese for Hong Kong release. However, an essay released by Tianyi-Shanghai in 1934 (for public relations purpose judging from its writing style) stated that the company once struggled with the possibility of dubbing or, due to the shortage of capital, separate sound recording during shooting, but resolved later to do only the best or nothing, and therefore insisted on using synchronized sound so as to guarantee high sound quality. As a result, it took Tianyi one year to gather the required capital for the purchase of the proper equipment and technical personnel from the United States.\textsuperscript{xxix} No matter what the truth of this, one may safely assume that it was not uncommon to prepare a Cantonese version of a film for the Cantonese audience in Hong Kong, and very likely in Southeast Asia as well.
Cinema and the care of the self

The role of Chinese economic elites in shaping the Hong Kong cinema, and their interaction with British authorities, can be understood in terms of two interlocking discourses, which were in tension with one another. The first may be termed the discourse of social hygiene, which assumes a top-down responsibility on the part of both colonial administrators and local cultural elites to uphold the spiritual and moral welfare of the ordinary person. The cinema was here defined as integral to a broader apparatus of training in citizenship, whether as loyal British subject or as Chinese patriot. A second type of rhetoric, however, emphasized pleasure and leisure rather than ethical cultivation, interpellating the ordinary subject as a consumer with a presumed interest in using market goods to enhance her/his free time. The tension and interaction of these two discourses determined the development of Hong Kong cinema as a political technology of government.

On the question of moral welfare, as well as providing the impetus for technical and organizational innovation, Chinese intellectuals and some capitalists paternalistically took it upon themselves to enhance the ethical and political standards of the population. They saw the cinema as a technology of the self that could encourage viewers to reform their own subjectivities in line with the demands of the paternalistic elites. In 1934, Lianhua founded the colony's second film magazine, Lianhua monthly, its mission being the dissemination of patriotic sentiments as much as the promotion of film literacy and of Lianhua's distinct identity as a company. Echoing similar political trends in the mainland, the self-image of many film workers and organizations in the colony also adopted a nationalist rhetoric. Incited by the Overseas Chinese Educational Association, the first of a series of "clean up cinema" campaigns raged in 1935 - even though it was basically a discursive affair with no concrete action. The commercial sector, however, turned crisis into opportunity. Under the headline "Response to the 'clean up cinema' campaign", a short piece of "film news" used censorship to attract an audience to a certain Hollywood film: "... the outcry [in the States] did not manage to remove all the films that address the needs of the audience, so another film will come, dauntlessly ..." More disciplinary measures were established from within the film industry in 1938 when the Film Association imposed limits on the advertisement of films. In the same year, the Overseas Chinese Film Association Branch held a contingency meeting to suppress fantasy and ghost films as part of a broader anti-superstition movement, immediately followed by the second "clean up cinema" campaign initiated by Luo Mingyou, Li Minwei and Bishop Hall of the local Anglican Church. Chinese and British elites often collaborated in producing this discourse of cleanliness, which praised the 1939 screening of the mainland-made film The Empress Dowager (Xi tai hou) as "scrubbing clean the degenerating attitudes of the southern Chinese cinema." That same year, the mainland-made ghost film The Woman Ghost in Her Bridal Chamber (Nu...
gui dongfang] was charged by the Hong Kong Government with including materials originally concealed from censorship authorities. It should be pointed out that the bulk of these disciplinary activities did not so much originate from the Hong Kong-British government as from groups closely affiliated with the mainland intellectual or artistic communities. Hong Kong-British government censorship of the period was basically directed towards Hollywood films with indecent material or politically sensitive mainland films, especially those portraying the civil war between the Communist and Nationalist Parties.

Whatever the actual motives, these disciplinary activities were conducted in the name of preserving the people's moral well-being, which was translated into the mainlanders' critique of the Hong Kong Chinese as gradually abdicating their nationalist identity and Chinese cultural heritage and taking up the self-destructive role of colonial "slaves" (see introduction). The discursive switch from viewing Hong Kong as a door to the West (and so to China's modernisation) to seeing the people of Hong Kong as slaves to colonialism found its way into the "clean-up cinema" campaigns: the impetus behind these campaigns was the image of the destructiveness of colonialism on the moral fibre of China. Similar rhetoric also informed the prevalent discourse of Hong Kong cinema of the 1930s from a Sino-centric point of view: that it was merely an "appendix" of China - something you must have but that is of no practical use. The reasoning behind this discourse runs something like this: "Hong Kong cinema" was the synonym for "extremely bad movies," infested with trivial concerns that bowed to Western ways; but progressive minds in the Shanghai film industry, especially the Lianhua Company, re-injected a conscience into Hong Kong films.

The local cinema also became a forum for further patriotic discourses around 1936, in response to the Japanese invasion. Films were seen by intellectuals as vehicles to cultivate an attitude of nationalistic responsibility among audiences: they were meant to interpellate viewers as subjects of the Chinese nation. In 1936, local film stars appeared in two major Cantonese opera theatres to help raise funds for combat planes, while others volunteered to perform as dance hostesses at a fund-raising ball. In 1938, the film industry organized voluntary charity events to aid the war effort, and theatre owners announced their readiness to earmark profits from some shows for war expenses. By 1939, numerous mainland filmmakers and producers were already passing through Hong Kong or taking refuge there in order to carry on their patriotic activities away from Japanese or Kuomintang (Guomindang, Nationalist Party) repression. Thus the cinema became part of a larger cultural and political campaign to produce patriotic viewers presumably interested in the fate of China.

In fact, Hong Kong cinema of the 1930s often became a site for political battles which had originated in the mainland. Paramount among them was the struggle over the
linguistic unification of Chinese culture around the "national language" (the Mandarin dialect). The use of Cantonese, a major impetus for the boom of the local film industry and a key selling point against Hollywood or mainland films, was also a frequent source of tension. As mentioned earlier on, thirteen films were released in Mandarin from 1938 to 1940, which meant the local cinema of the 1930s was basically Cantonese. In 1936, however, four first-run movie theatres in Guangzhou, where Cantonese was the vernacular language, refused to show Cantonese films for ambiguous business reasons. The following year, the Chinese government announced a nation-wide ban on Cantonese films, but the measure was successfully repealed at Beijing before its actual implementation. Within Hong Kong itself, Mandarin films were shown at cut prices to snatch Cantonese film customers: although the motivations for this particular move may have been partly commercial, the promotion of Mandarin was often also motivated by a patriotic concern with educating the audience.

Patriotism was also a motive for publicity campaigns against Hollywood films. In July 1934, for example, the Astor Theatre called for the support of guo pian and guo huo (national merchandise - that is, made in mainland China or Hong Kong) to visiting viewers in the name of a "guo huo movement", packaging itself as "the main center of guo pian on the Kowloon Peninsula" with first-run screening rights from Lianhua and Tianyi. The theatre, mainly a venue for Cantonese "new opera" performances before that month, announced that they had "recently renewed their contact with major local manufacturers," and would offer guo huo items free to thank those who supported guo pian. Participating sponsors included a cosmetic company (On Wah), a food company (Po Shan), and the Elephant Tower brand of hair spray and fixer.

This vision of the cinema as a pedagogic medium was echoed, albeit with a different agenda, by the British authorities, who were largely interested in preventing the colony's predominantly Chinese population from engaging in any political activities of a patriotic or anti-capitalist nature. Although colonial rulers were mainly concerned with de-politicizing the people rather than encouraging any patriotic feeling, they often employed a moral rhetoric strangely similar to that of Chinese patriots. Both groups struggled to define and impose a standard of morality on the population at large. The Chinese activists' nationalistic emphasis on social hygiene and moral education therefore found its counterpart in the official policy discourses of the Hong Kong-British government. The latter's activities arose particularly in response to the massive outburst of popular protest during the anti-British General Strike of 1925-6, but its practice of crisis management in the name of reconciliatory politics continued into the 1930s.

One move in 1929 was to increase the number of Chinese economic notables appointed Unofficial Members of the Legislative and Executive Council from two to three. This was meant to defuse anti-colonial sentiment by incorporating economic elites into the colonial government, albeit in posts that lacked effective decision-making power.
The British authorities' reform of education began with the establishment of the Chinese Language Department at the University of Hong Kong, and was continued under the 1929 committee appointed to check Kuomingtang influences and textbooks in vernacular schools. In 1930, a committee was appointed to recommend "more practical knowledge of the Chinese written language, more up-to-date books" and "less teaching of the Classics and Chinese History" for Anglo-Chinese schools. In 1931, the Overseas Chinese Education Committee (formed in 1929) set up new regulations including measures to encourage the teaching of Mandarin and efforts to exclude Communist influence from schools. In 1933, Mandarin was added to the curriculum of the Government Vernacular Middle School and the Vernacular Normal School for Women. Many other major educational reforms resulted from the famous Barney Report (1935) by the Queen's specially appointed commissioner of education. This report recommended more effective teaching of English, and also gave serious consideration as to how to further instruction in the Chinese language, how much teaching of Chinese Classics was actually needed, and whether the medium of instruction for Chinese classes should be Cantonese or Mandarin. The concern in education reform was far deeper than pacification via the sanction of the Chinese language: the British colonial rulers were very much aware of how the Confucian paradigm of social relations and code of conduct was a much more powerful way to effective government than was coercion.

The rhetoric of "health," "cleanliness" and "moral rectitude" was also explicit in the movement to outlaw prostitution, a movement which began in 1932 and reached its final phase by the mid-1930s. The emphasis on personal hygiene and physical education also materialized into two increasingly important core subjects in the primary and secondary school curricula as well as in teachers' training regulations. Further measures included the enforcement of health codes and sanitary regulations for schools, the introduction of a system of medical examination for all school children, and a territory-wide Health Campaign in 1934 that involved representatives of the medical, educational, charity and religious organizations. The British government was clearly penetrating and controlling more and more aspects of the population's daily life and behavior, illustrating Foucault's statement that "the care of individual life is becoming at this moment a duty for the [modern] state.

For the purposes of this paper, it is the colonial government's intervention in the area of film and entertainment that is the most significant aspect of this campaign for "social insurance" through physical and moral education. Film censorship was introduced in 1934, although the guiding principles and rationale were not publicly announced. Less obviously, film was connected to newspapers. Some writers in the column pages
of newspapers, who often hid their identity behind pseudonyms, were particularly interested in a-political issues concerning the domain of everyday life and conduct. This group of "minor" cultural practitioners were not official vehicles for the colonial government although they often endorsed notions of "proper conduct". And though they tended to put Hong Kong matters in the larger "Chinese" context, they also sought to focus on existential issues of modern Hong Kong in its day-to-day experience of Westernization, to which the Chinese elite was rather indifferent. They were the in-between class, the voice of the local people, populist at times, and yet opinion leaders. The inconsistencies in subject matter and contradictions in views in their writings demonstrated their constant negotiation among different loyalties and standpoint, as can be detected in at least two areas.

The first area was in film reviews, especially on Cantonese and local films. Their engagement with films showed they were highly conscious of Hong Kong's inferior position and its contemptible cultural aroma in the eyes of the mainlanders (seen as the "proper" Chinese culture). Their writing often called for, or at least implied, an ideal of a worthwhile local cinema to which the engaged manifestly with contemporary life - what I would call "reflectionist realism," and with questions of human existence - what I would call "humanist realism." This in a way was in congruence with the views of those critics of Hong Kong cinema "from the center."^viii

The other area, which contrasted with the first, was the bulk of writings in the column pages that dealt with everyday life. To open up this under-explored subject, let us consider "Waves of the fragrant sea" [Xianghai tao sheng], the title for one of the two column pages of Wah kiu yat po. Towards the middle of 1934, this page, full of recent Cantonese songs and lyrics with commentaries, gradually opened up to include short essays commenting on aspects of everyday life. Judging from the content and rhetoric, many of these essays were not written as authoritative statements, but either as humor, or as personal reflections on experience, in an effort to understand what "modern" meant. The most fascinating example was a serial discussion on "swimming" that spread across the entire summer. This group of essays, all by the same author and intended to be humorous, commented on everything about swimming: types of artificial swimming facilities in Hong Kong, swimming in the pool versus bathing in the sea, China-made swimming-suits and the shakiness of patriotism, the progressive nature of women's swim-suits, how men should take opportunities of beach-going, the material, colors and styles of women's swimming-suits and so on. The page was not lacking in serious discussions, under titles such as "My view on separating men and women in swimming" (27 July) and "On the proposal to divide up the swimming zone according to the genders"(11 July). An essay in old Chinese, titled "An eclectic discussion on nudity," expressed an apparently neutral but actually sympathetic view on nudity in relation to the government prohibition of a German film because of its explicit images of nudity (3
July). Other genres of writing, such as dialogue, personal witness, prose and expository writing, were adopted wherever appropriate to expound on the topics of day-to-day relations: "Dialogue: husband and wife" (22 June), "Thoughts on romantic relationships" (22 June), "About women" (20 June), "A modern dialogue" (on a woman’s being someone's mistress, June 8), "Scenes in the office" (8 June), "To stop early marriage" (4 August), "A scene in the classroom" (1 August), "Marriage and money" (2 July), "Theatre" (on urban life as a stage for drama, 8 June), "The socialising flower" (8 June), "Modern movement: will it prevent worldwide depression?" (6 February), "The entrapment of modern youth" (2 February), "Exploring 'marriage as a tomb'" (4 August) and so on. These titles recall both the themes of the best known movies (guo pian) of the time, and also local news items. The latter were treated in such a way as to highlight narrative intricacies and "dramatic" twist-and-turns; and these items often sat side by side with, and without clear demarcation from, movie advertisements written in the form of news reports. One representative example was a piece on Sek Yau-yu's Bitter sea [Ku hai], which started off with the plot line of the film presented in a news report style: only if the reader read carefully until the very end of the brief item would he or she find the one line that said, "Visit the Central Theatre: opens soon." Surrounding this piece were other local news items concerning family tragedies, killings and so on.¹

As a matter of fact, the "local news" page in the first half of the decade was no more than real-life melodrama, community news and announcements on movies, theatre, and entertainment. There were short pieces on amendments to government regulations and ordinances and so on, but no in-depth coverage of local events, or serious engagement with local issues. This contrasts with government annual reports and colonial papers, where one finds much going on in the areas of urban construction and the attempt to "enlighten" the entire population. The obsession with personal life drama/trauma echoes the care for self-management in everyday life articulated in the column pages and in movies, a world of either modernized Chinese/Cantonese traditions or didactic melodrama. Local news in this sense equaled moral guidance or was itself a moral discourse. In this way, the intermediate cultural elite, through their unique literary public sphere, provided a forum mediating the dominant instrumental rationality for the reading public.

Film texts (especially those with a contemporary setting), popular writing and the discursive construction of real-life melodrama in local news formed a complex paradigm that suggested not only models for conduct, but a relatively fluid space of internal dialogue within the grass-root sector, and of social-moral engagement that allowed ambiguities and negotiations.

¹ Screening the past
Issue 11
The discourse of pleasure

The early 1930s was a brief period of peace when the anti-colonial riots which had been occurring since the mid-20s finally calmed down. The relative decline of nationalistic zeal during the early 1930s and the flourishing of popular culture led to an obsession with "Cantonese traditions" in the climate of pleasure in this "golden age" of leisure facilities (the movie theatres, evening Cantonese song forums, entertainment/recreation centers in department stores, herbal tea-houses, and the dawn of Chinese radio programs already described). The women freed from prostitution soon became a crucial additional source of labor for the broadening Cantonese song forum arena in need of their talents. The new public spaces formed the major sites of pleasure-seeking for weekend leisure, socialization among businessmen, night life, and a brief break from work during the day. While the colonial government emphasized moral education and civic training as effective methods of internal pacification, it also sanctioned a hedonistic attitude that would divert attention from political activism. Sporting activities, day trips to the countryside and holiday tours boomed, and cinema grew alongside all of these. One of the numerous legislative decisions in 1933-1934, for example, endorsed the amendment of the ordinances on places of public entertainment, which detailed the measures to ensure safety in theatres and cinemas.\(^\text{II}\)

The number of theatres grew from eight in 1920 to twelve in 1930 and thirty-five by 1935.\(^\text{III}\) There was no real movie circuit system yet, but there were occasional simultaneous screenings in two theatres. Of all the theatres in operation, only a few were regular shared venues with Cantonese "new opera." According to a local writer in the 1940s, the first proper movie theatre with both basic facilities and luxurious decor was Queen's Theatre, run by British merchants, opened in 1924.\(^\text{IV}\) On 31 March 1931, the gigantic King's Theatre opened across the street from Queen's, introducing the fashion in luxurious movie palaces. King's, located in Central, re-constructed in 1963 and finally demolished in the mid-1980s, was the first local theatre to have air-conditioning in summer and winter. According to a 1931 report, the theatre was run by China Entertainment and Realty Company Limited. It was seven-storeys high, and was complimented for its soft flooring, luxurious lighting fixtures, fine sound facilities and the latest "anti-fire" projector. The theatre was devoted to first-run movies from Paramount and Fox.\(^\text{V}\) Next in luxury came Central Theatre (founded by Chinese money on the same road as King's), a Gothic design with a dome, a restaurant and the territory's first escalator inside a theatre.\(^\text{V}\) The next "palace" was Ping On Theatre on the Kowloon Peninsula. This theatre advertised continuously for over a month in the movie advertisements pages before its grand opening, highlighting particularly its modern interior and superior facilities. The ad carried a frontal sketch of the theatre, with a lengthy text that read: "construction has been going on for two years, spending a million dollars. Construction fully follows sound theories, with most modern interior and
exterior decors, glamorous and noble. ... Equipped with the most famous RCA new sound system, clear and accurate deliverance of sound. ... Seating capacity 1,800. Fully air conditioned.\textsuperscript{vi} On 1 February 1934, Ping On opened with Warner Brothers' Gold diggers of 1933 (USA 1933). Many other theatres opened in the first half of the 1930s, and all were very conscious of their comfort and facilities in comparison with the giant picture palaces. For example, next to a short news item that proclaimed the air-conditioned comfort at the King's, the Astor presented a more defensive announcement: "[our screening] was very well attended despite the hot weather. We would therefore reward our audience with cosmetic items. But most importantly, our theatre is well ventilated on four sides, therefore viewers do not feel the heat sitting inside. ..."\textsuperscript{vii}

The discussion of the cinema as a public site of leisure time should not be confined to purpose-built movie theatres. Although the previous practice of exhibition in open spaces and tents often temporarily erected in the evening had disappeared altogether by the 1930s, movies still shared the same facilities with Cantonese opera performance, a situation that had prevailed since the early years of film exhibition. And though there is not sufficient information on how much film viewing took place in facilities sponsored by the Christian church in the earlier part of the century, the limited evidence available from the 1930s shows that the YMCA, for example, publicly screened documentary films.\textsuperscript{viii} A more popular site of film exhibition were the recreation complexes that occupied the top floors of the colony's major department stores. Here movie screenings stood side by side with other compound facilities such as artificial gardens, dance-halls and cafes. Within a few steps, pleasure-seekers could move from Cantonese opera to Cantonese song forums, the visual contemplation of famous scenic spots, or stories of great loves and battles from around the world on the movie screen; or from the aesthetic appreciation of calligraphy and paintings in the exhibition hall to vaudeville and magic shows, or exhibitions of "exotic" human beings and animals ranging from dwarfs, giants, twins, persons with deformed features or tigers, peacocks, crocodiles and so on.\textsuperscript{ix}

The so-called "full-time" movie theatres were not absolutely confined to commercial screening purposes. It was not uncommon to find in the "local and community news" pages instances of secondary school graduation ceremonies, or other kinds of private occasions held in movie palaces.\textsuperscript{x} Movie theatres, with their luxurious architecture and ornamentation, became a fashionable site of communal activities, a new popular version of city or community hall. Evidently, the practice of screening films had also entered the general repertoire of leisure activities and communal celebrations. Thus, the pleasure experience propagated in these circumstances was not domestic private pleasure, but pleasure played out, shared and appropriated in public spaces.

The discourse of pleasure and leisure often emphasized pathos and sensational

\textit{Screening the past}

\textit{Issue 11}
gratification, often to excess. Sexual material and the display of women's bodies were highlighted in writings in daily newspapers and publicity materials. On other occasions, foreign films were promoted as a pleasurable window to the West, often emphasizing the grandeur of landscape and famous landmarks in the West. For example, a publicity pamphlet describes a film shot in the North Pole as providing a detailed description of life and vegetation there, with intense exotic interest. The discourse of pleasure did not, however, proceed in complete isolation from patriotic and moralistic discourses. Writings on mainland films emphasised the intensity of romantic tragedy and/or patriotic sentiment. It will be relevant at this point to discuss The twin sisters (Zimei hua, 1933, directed by Zheng Zhengqiu), described in Hong Kong film writing as one of the most popular films from Shanghai in 1934.

The film, made by Star Film Company in Shanghai, was reported to have screened in six major movie theatres in three months, though this may have been just publicity tactics. Movie ads suggest it was not uncommon for a movie - whether from Hollywood, UK or mainland China - to screen in different theatres at different times: the movie circuit system was not yet developed, but, as the average duration of a film's stay in one theatre was around three to four days, it would not have been economical to have a film coming a long way to be shown in just one theatre. Such advertising rhetoric also contributed to the construction of a film's popularity discursively around its success on the mainland: produced at Shanghai's Star Film Company by progressive and leftist artists associated with the Communist Party, the film was known for its critique of the capitalist erosion of the human conscience.

However, in publicity materials, the story of the film, which follows the hardships of twin sisters - one a modern, Westernized city type, and the other a more traditional village girl - was emphasized more for its star Butterfly Wu (aka. Hu Die, who played both sisters in the film), the quality of its full soundtrack (Mandarin dialogue), its achievement as a guo pian, and its popularity in China. A number of advertisements for the film went to great lengths to document its screening itinerary on the mainland: "60 days continuously at Xinguang Theatre in Shanghai," then 28 days at Central Theatre, Shanghai, "meeting a total of over 250,000 viewers"; and "screened in two theatres simultaneously in Guangzhou, meeting over 100,000 viewers," and that "these were true evidences and valid guarantee." As well as this, there were always vague descriptions such as "very moving story" and "best of guo pian" without further qualification. In common with popular writings, local news stories, and story films appealing to the crowd, The twin sisters had a convoluted and sentimental story line, focusing on the sad lives of young suffering women. This type of critically-denigrated, but popular, fiction was known as the "mandarin duck and butterfly" genre. On the local news pages in the Chinese-language newspapers of any day in the first half of the 1930s, one can find a handful of reports of family drama, suicide, marriage dispute and
romance tragedies, all written in dramatic style, and sometimes even more convoluted than the plot-lines of *The twin sisters*. In more than a few instances, these real life incidents were treated like case studies, perhaps with sub-headings to clarify the convoluted events, and in other cases, were built around documentation of a couple's dialogue in court. bxiv

As implied earlier, Star Film Company was eager to take a share in the booming market of Hong Kong, but successes like *The twin sisters* were only intermittent. It was Tianyi, later on under the name of a local company Nanyang, which had the biggest market share in Hong Kong. Indeed Tianyi set out to respond to public taste, and so to embrace any cause that would stretch their audience profile, including patriotic sentimentalism as well as social conscience. Lianhua remained the progressive voice, defending not only social conscience and anti-imperial sentiment, but also so-called Judeo-Christian and other "healthy" values in the guise of "traditional" Chinese virtues. The crisscrossing of these different strands of texts requires a separate study.

People congregating in the public sphere of the cinema were constantly confronted with the choice between Western or Chinese. The emerging public sphere of the cinema in the 1930s contained many strands of tension: between civility and disobedience; between the Hong Kong-British administration's need to cultivate docility in the aftermath of the strike and the intellectuals' on-going efforts to cultivate nationalism among local Chinese; between the imperatives of hedonistic consumerism and self-less civic responsibility; and between the colonial state and local society. These tensions were not usually played out in any form of coercion or external violence (as had often been the case in previous decades), but were expressed in the swings of mood and alternating moments of the local people's civic participation and British government demands, of patriotic activism, of social reforms and of hedonistic pursuits in leisure activities such as cinema.

In brief, the "care of the self" and "pleasure/leisure" were not isolated discourses: they often went hand in hand, thus camouflaging the explicit political implications of each.

Most discussions of the public sphere emphasise its concrete locations: regarding Hong Kong in the 1930s, I would argue for the necessity to look at the composition of the actual population. The transient quality of this in the 1930s is best illustrated by the 1931 census, which reported that in the urban district, only 6% of the population had been in the colony for more than thirty years, about 45% for twenty years, and roughly a third claimed to have been born in the colony, while nearly half recorded that they had been born in the Delta region of the Si Kiang River. bxv In general, immigration to Hong Kong had exceeded emigration for most of the time since 1900, with an exception in 1930, the time of "worldwide depression in trade" and the instability of the Hong Kong dollar. bxvi It is not surprising, then, that the transient nature of the residence of many
"Hong Kong persons" and the fluctuations of emigration and immigration intermittently disrupted the consolidation of any sense of a "local people": it was difficult to conceive of the people as a collective, which would participate in the different phases of acculturation and socialisation through a history of shared experience. The question is not just that of discontinuity in the growth rate or the composition of the population, but also the effects of transience on life-style, degree of social commitment and general mentality. The first half of the 1930s, as already described, was a unique period of relative peace and stability, where the local residents were not only free from the threats of social and political turmoil, but also able to internalise its multifarious human resources. It was not so much about who was born native, or how long one had settled in the colony, but a question of who could prove oneself Hong Kong in face of the wide-ranging choices within the paradigm of "local-ness". Film, and particularly film in the Cantonese language, played an important role in this.

Conclusion: sinicisation/Cantonisation of the public sphere

The public sphere that evolved in Hong Kong in the early 1930s was a sphere of leisure bringing recreation, and of popular entertainment bringing pleasure - via theatre, cinema, song forums, herbal tea-houses, dancing halls, entertainment parks (gardens and roof-top entertainment quarters of department stores) and so on. To the colonial administration, it was a special sphere where people's restlessness and fear of instability could be co-opted: they could rest their mind from the emotionally charged concerns of politics, feel assured that their Chinese patriotic obligation would be articulated and fulfilled, be consoled through the re-connection with their "indigenous" (Cantonese) culture via the modernized vehicles for Cantonese songs and operas, and be affirmed of the power of their regional dialect, Cantonese. Within the world of Cantonese folk music, the Hong Kong Chinese felt sheltered from their rulers - for the songs they consumed often implicitly criticised bad rulers, or unrestrainedly expressed lamentation and sorrow. This new public sphere was enabled by a number of factors: the dawn of Cantonese broadcasting, the boom of record companies, the modernization of Cantonese opera, the birth of sound films, the business sector's conscious effort to support and participate in the domain of leisure and pleasure, and urbanization projects. The integration of film into this paradigm was a significant contribution to this sinification process.

In brief, this newly emerged public sphere saw its members organizing their beliefs and experiences around clusters of concerns that addressed both their ethnicity and their physical existence as a Hong Kong-British subject. The docility required of these colonial subjects depended largely upon their ability to be comfortable with a collective identity drawn from their ethnic origin. In the history of the transient population of Hong Kong, this was the first moment where the public sphere emerged and was fully

*Screening the past*

Issue 11
Linda Lai, 'Hong Kong cinema in the 1930s: docility, social hygiene, pleasure-seeking & the consolidation of the film industry'

sinicised/Cantonised for the good of both the ruler and the ruled. It was the first success of the British colonial administration in embracing the naturalization of a local Chinese public sphere after almost a century of anti-colonial unrest and uprisings.

From another angle, throughout this essay, I have sought to contest four widely circulated and often contradictory historiographic discourses about the 1920s and 1930s. The first describes the 1930s as the "golden age of leisure," a view held by local cultural anecdotists who by and large remain the few spokespersons of Hong Kong's cultural history: I re-contextualise this "golden age" within the commodification of the Cantonese folk traditions (including film), as a will to survival and a yearning for momentary peace and stability. The second is the discourse that characterises Hong Kong people's "fall of grace" in both decades, to become the mainland's intellectual "slaves": I suggest that this is a part of the movement for social hygiene, sustained by both local elites and the colonial government, indirectly informing the perception of local cinema, particularly among the opinion-forming intermediate-level cultural workers who wrote for the newspapers. The third discourse reads the blossoming of local filmmaking in the 1930s as an unfortunate delay, due to the famous anti-British General Strike in 1925-6, suggesting a vacuum period, 1926-29, of futile waiting: I have presented a more complex view that stresses, among other things, the importance of a growing awareness of Cantonese-ness from within as one key factor for the consolidation of a film industry that was basically Cantonese. The fourth discourse, an echo of the second, is a Shanghai-centric perspective that asserts Hong Kong cinema as peripheral, trivial and in need of constant nourishment from its Sino-centre: this view simply ignores the development I have described of the local film arena and the reality of Hong Kong as a growing urban domain. In the course of capturing these discourses and their impact on 1930s, I have attempted to uncover the possible positions of the "local" persons, and especially what kind of space was available for them to deal with the often contradictory ways they were addressed in the public domain.

All of this has opened up further issues, which are clearly in need of future research. First is the consumption of Hollywood and British films - the really dominant cinema in Hong Kong - in the first 30 years of the 20th century in Hong Kong; and particularly what happened to this in the 1930s with the sinification of the public domain of leisure and pleasure. Second is Cantonese opera's struggle to survive, especially in the 1930s in the face of rising competition from film. Thirdly, there is the rise and development of modern drama (often translated as "civilized drama," or in Chinese literally meaning "spoken drama"): here, my research suggests that its dramatic quality resonated with that of contemporary-setting motion pictures, and its social and moral concerns with much popular writing. Fourthly, a thorough discussion on the discourse surrounding "women" is needed. Lastly, one key event in the 1930s that asserted a long-term impact on the everyday life of the citizen was the dawn of Cantonese-language broadcasting

Screening the past

Issue 11
and the gradual popularization of radio sets as prices reduced.

What is clear from the present research is how thoroughly film became integrated into the sinification process, and how important was its place in the public sphere in Hong Kong in the 1930s.

In this paper, all names of directors are spelt based on their Cantonese pronunciation, because those spellings are already in use in English-language or bilingual publications. Movie titles are provided in both pinyin, and English translation.

Stephen Teo, "Tracing the electric shadow: a brief history of the early Hong Kong cinema," in Early images of Hong Kong and China (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1995), 46.

See Yu Mo-wan, Eighty years of Hong Kong cinema [Xianggang dianying bashi nian] (Hong Kong: Regional Council, 1994), section on the 1920s; also vol.1 of Yu Mo-wan, Conversations on Hong Kong film history[Xianggang dianying shi hua] (Hong Kong: Sub-culture, 1996).

Hong Kong Film Archive, Hong Kong filmography, vol.1, 1913-1941 (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1997), 3-4.

Hong Kong administration report 1934 (Hong Kong Government), Chapter III, 4. According to figures quoted, the local population, totaling 944,492 persons, was composed of 20,908 non-Chinese (2.21%) and 923,584 Chinese (97.79%). The proportion of Chinese had been rising slowly: from 96% in 1911 to 97.63% in 1921. See also: S.G. Davis, Hong Kong: in its geographical setting (London: Collins, 1949), 96.

Choi Po-king, "From 'slave education' and 'cultural desert' to the rise of local culture: the development of Hong Kong culture and the changes of the revolution in China" [Cong 'nu hua jiaoyu' yu 'wen hua shamo' dao bentu wenhua de taitou: Xianggang wenhua de fazhan yu Zhongguo jindai geming de zhuanzhe]; Education bulletin 18, no.2, 1990 (Hong Kong: School of Education, Chinese University of Hong Kong): 153-64.

See Hong Kong filmography, volume I.


Hansen, 7.


Hong Kong filmography, 3-12.

These figures are based on newspaper research, and may differ slightly from those presented in the Hong Kong Filmography, vol. 1.
Yu Mo-wan, "A historical note on the development of news documentary films in Hong Kong" [Xianggang xinwen jilu dianying fa zhang shi hua], Changes in Hong Kong society through cinema (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1988), 96-7.


Radio-Television Hong Kong, "RTHK history," in Sixty years of radio broadcasting in Hong Kong (Hong Kong: 1988), 16.

Chan Fei-nung [Chen Feinong], "The different kinds of changes in Cantonese Opera in recent years" [Jin nian yueju de ge zhong biandong]; in Sixty years of Cantonese opera [Yueju liushi nian] (Hong Kong: Chan Fei-nung, 1984), 57-62.

Chan Fei-nung, 57.

Industrial & Commercial Press, 4 July 1934, III-3: see "cinema news" in the "local news" section.


According to late director Kwan Man-ching (Guan Wenqing), the company was still-born. See A history of the silver screen, quoted in Early images of Hong Kong and China (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1995), 134.

Wah kiu was founded 5 June 1925, one of the two key Chinese-language dailies in the first half of the 1930s. The other was Industrial & commercial daily press (Kung sheung yat po), founded 15 November 1930 by business magnate and prominent Chinese entrepreneur Sir Robert Ho Tung. Both newspapers targeted local business and were anti-Communist. See Lee Siu-nam Lee, "The Chinese and Western newspaper business in Hong Kong" [Xianggang de zhong xi bao ye], in Wang Gengwu (ed.), Hong Kong history: new perspectives, vol. 2 (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1997), 513-5.

Ou Yongxiang, "The so-called 'Hong Kong movies'," in Film tribute (Dianying luntan, meaning "film forum") 2, no.2, March 1948 (Guangzhou).


Fu Meng, "Return from the battleground" [Zhandi guila], "Drama talk", Wah kiu, 6 February 1934, IV-3.

For example, movie ads in Wah kiu, 2 April II-1 (Struggle); 8 June, I-2 (Loss of love); 22 June, I-2 (Struggle); 26 June, II-4 (A female star).

Industrial & Commercial, 20 July 1934, III-3 (local news).

Screening the past

Issue 11
Chinese Film Archive, *Chinese silent films* [Zhongguo wusheng dianying] (Beijing: China Film Publications, 1996), 54-55. For original essay, see Tianyi, “Tianyi Company’s ten-year experience” [Tianyi gongsi shi nian jingli shi], in *Chinese film yearbook 1934* [Zhongguo dianying nianjian] (China Educational Film Society).

* Early images of Hong Kong cinema (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1995), 127.

* Industrial & commercial, 8 January 1935.

* Early images, 135.

* New world movie news* 14, 13 January 1940.

* Eight imported films were banned and 505,227 feet of film cut in 1933, and in 1934 an equal volume had been reached by the middle of the year. See *Industrial & commercial*, 24 July 1934, III-3.

* Ou Yongxiang.

* Early images, 134.

* Chinese mail*, 27 February 1938.

* Cheng Jiuhua, 75-94. The exodus of Shanghai film personnel began roughly in 1937 with Cai Chusheng (director) and Situ Weimin (script-writer) and Xia Yan.

* Early images, 134-5.

* Early images, 134.

* See movie ads in *Wah kiu*, 17 July 1934, II-1, and local/community news items in *Industrial & commercial*, 17 July 1934, III-3.

* Yuen Bong-kin (Yuan Bangjian), *A brief history of Hong Kong* [Xianggang shi lue], (Hong Kong, 1993), 157.

* Anthony Sweeting, *Education in Hong Kong pre-1841 to 1941: fact & opinion* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1990), 350-7, 401-3.

* Sweeting, 352-4.

* Sweeting, 355-6.


See three different reviews of *The romantic tide of the singing couple* in *Wah kiu*, January 1934.


1 See advertisement for *Bitter sea*, *Wah kiu*, 1 May 1934, II-2.

2 "Special fire precautions relating to cinematograph operation and cinematograph films throughout the colony," Part II, Revision of "Places of Public Entertainment Regulation" (Ordinance no. 22 of 1919), no. 599 (3 August 1934), *Hong Kong government gazette*, v. 80 (Hong Kong Government Printer, 1934), 599-604.

3 Cheng Po-hung (ed.), *A century of Hong Kong roads and streets* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2000), 92-3; and Cheung Po-hung & Dung Bo-ming (eds.), *A century of Kowloon roads and streets* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2000), 92.

4 Chan Sai-fung (Chen Shifeng), "The development of movie theatres in the past forty years" [Sishinian lai dianyingyuan yangzi], in Lai Chun-wai (Li Jinwei) (ed.), *Centenary history of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Nam Chung, 1948), 119-20.

5v *Theatre life* (*Yingxi shenghuo*) 1, no.33, 1931; anthologized in Chinese Film Archive's *Chinese silent cinema*, 212-3. See also Chan Sai-fung, 120.

4v Cheng Po-hung, 93.

5v See movie ad in *Wah kiu*, 1 January 1934, I-2.

5v *Industrial & commercial*, 20 July 1934 III-3.

5vii *Industrial & Commercial*, 4 July 1934, III-3 ("community news").

5x Chan Sai-fung (Chen Shifeng), "History of the rise and fall of the entertainment grounds" [You le chang xing ti shi], in *Centenary history of Hong Kong*, 122.

5x Non-cinema usage of theatres is documented in *Industrial & commercial*, 29 July 1934, III-3; 5 January 1935, III-4; 5 January 1935, III-3; 18 July 1934, III-3.

5d *Central theatre weekly*, June 1930.

5di *Industrial & commercial*, 20 June 1934, III-3 and 15 July 1934, III-3.

5dii See movie ad covering top half of the front page of *Wah kiu yat po*, 20 May 1934, I-1.

5dv An example is the long report of a court case that involved Leung Choi-chun and her two sisters, a dispute that grew from their occupation in the dance-halls. See *Wah kiu*, 17 July, IV-1. See also report of

*Screening the past*

*Issue 11*
a court case about a husband hurting his wife with an axe, *Wah kiu*, 3 February, II-4.

\textsuperscript{lv} S.G. Davis, *Hong Kong: in its geographical setting* (London: Collins, 1949), 97.

\textsuperscript{lvii} Davis, 99.