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### One Hundred Years Of Chinese Cinema: A Generational Dialogue

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# Foreword

*Haili Kong*

When we look back on the past century, we find that filmmaking was perhaps the most fascinating and fastest growing visual art form and mass medium in China, in the process, becoming an important and integral part of people's cultural and social life. Although Chinese films were made as early as 1905, they really did not catch any international critical attention until after the mid-1980s, when films originated from China started winning numerous international awards and arresting worldwide acknowledgment. Consequently, Chinese cinema studies has become one of the fastest growing and most vibrant academic fields in the West, evidenced by some university courses, many books and articles, and a number of conferences and symposia.

In October 2000, we held a week-long Chinese Film Festival, with participation by four internationally acclaimed Chinese film directors, and coorganized an International Symposium on Chinese Cinema, at Swarthmore College, funded predominantly by the Cooper Foundation and partially by Temple University. The purpose of the film festival-and-symposium was to explore the innovations, continuities, and development of Chinese film through successive generations of Chinese film artists. This event provided a forum for dialogues between film directors from three and maybe four different generations, between film directors and their critics and audiences, and between theoreticians and practitioners. The goal was very successfully achieved. Invited directors were Xie Jin (leading Third Generation film director from the Shanghai Film Studio), Shi Shujun (Fourth Generation film director from the Shanghai Film Studio), Wu Ziniu (Fifth Generation film director from the Beijing Film Studio), and Huo Jianqi (newly emerged film director whose two recent films *Postmen in the Mountains* won several awards from both the 1999 Montreal Film Festival and the 2000 India International Film Festival, and *Life Show* won three awards from the 2002 Shanghai international Film Festival). Several leading scholars on Chinese film studies attended the symposium and presented papers on Chinese films produced at different stages. After the symposium, all participants, including the film directors, felt a strong urge to publish a book that shares with film scholars and the general readership the discussed issues and the generational dialogues among scholars, film directors, and audiences.

Therefore, we have carefully chosen some of the revised papers for this volume, as well as other papers that cover some important issues not discussed at the symposium. The objective of this volume is to explore a century of Chinese film history, theory, and practice, with a focus on national

cinema, cinema and globalization, genres, styles, directors, audience reception, and the relation of film to politics.

This volume is divided into five parts. Part One begins with discussion on visual style in the silent films made in the early 1930s. And, then, a careful case study of the film *Qing Gong Mi Shi* [Hidden History of the Qing Court] (1948) investigates three forms of tension reflected both in the text and context of this film: reform versus revolution; popular sentiments versus political representation; and public history versus private life. Part Two includes three chapters focusing on analyzing historicized cinematic texts through three different film genres (country film and historical films produced in different eras) in an intertextual and comparative way. Tang's essay intensively explores how rural women are portrayed in *Li Shuangshuang* (1962) and *Ermo* (1994) by different generational film directors and how drastic social change is represented. Karl's essay compares two influential historical films, *Lin Zexu* (1959) and *The Opium War* (1997), in terms of their different cinematic representations of the Opium War, and further discusses about the political and psychological burdens of history reflected in filmmaking. Xiao and Yin's essay continues to explore how history is purposely to reenvision and rewrite at the end of the twentieth century in *My 1919* (1999). In Part Three, Kong's essay focuses on the role of symbolism in Zhang Yimou's early films; and Xudong Zhang offers a comprehensive discussion on Zhang Yimou's further cinematic development in the 1990s. In Part Four, Weijie Song's essay provides insightful analysis of Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* (1995), a urban film that boldly portrays the infamous Cultural Revolution through a colorful lens based on a lost teenager's narcissistic memories. Jiang Wen, arguably considered as either a post-Fifth or Sixth Generation filmmaker, has played a special bridging role in between the Fifth Generation and the Sixth Generation filmmakers, and his film leads audience into cityscape and individualized history. Furthermore, Sun, by using Lou Ye as a case, focuses on the breakthrough of the Sixth Generation filmmakers since the early 1990s. Yingjin Zhang discusses theoretical issues of global/local film production in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan at the turn of the century. The last part offers three interviews with individual directors from different generations, Xie Fei, Wu Ziniu, and Lou Ye, which may render additional perspectives for our reader to understand Chinese cinema in a fuller picture.