

The Oxford Handbook of CHINESE CINEMAS

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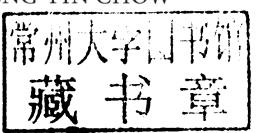
CHINESE CINEMAS

Edited by

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and

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INTRODUCTION

chinese cinemas and the art of extrapolation

CARLOS ROJAS

Cinema is the art of extrapolation—the production of the appearance of movement from an array of still images. While this process is most obvious with the technology of film itself, in which this illusory movement is the product of a series of transparencies presented at a rate such that the brain perceives them to be in continuous motion, even nonfilmic technologies of the moving image—ranging from precinematic devices such as the zoetrope, phenakistoscope, and parxinoscope, to what we might call postcinematic media such as video and DV—similarly use a constellation of static elements ranging from discrete images to individual pixels in order to create a semblance of movement. The magic of cinema, therefore, lies not in any of its individual constituent images, but rather in the imagined space that opens up between them.

A comparable process of *conceptual* extrapolation, meanwhile, undergirds our understanding of the field of cinema itself. Any body of cinematic production—from a single director's oeuvre to an entire genre—comprises a set of works, people, and institutions that are perceived as being linked to one another in a salient manner. Like the illusory movement that stitches together a succession of individual film frames into a moving picture, however, the networks of connections viewed as holding a field together are not intrinsic to the field itself, but rather are essentially projected onto it by outside observers. The field of Chinese cinema, accordingly, is grounded not on the individual works themselves, but rather on the extrapolated networks within which those works are positioned.

To be clear, though, the point is not that there are *no* connections linking the works within a putative field to one another, but rather precisely the opposite—there are simply *too many* vectors along which we might perceive these relationships. In classifying works into meaningful taxonomies, we could, for instance, use criteria such as the works' subject, language, length, audience, ideology, historical period, funding sources, political orientation, or medium of production. These various criteria overlap with and diverge