



EDITED BY

CARLOS

ROJAS

EILEEN CHENG-YIN

CHOW

≡ The Oxford Handbook of
**CHINESE
CINEMAS**

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

CHINESE CINEMAS

Edited by

CARLOS ROJAS

and

EILEEN CHENG-YIN CHOW



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CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Berry is Professor of Contemporary Chinese Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers* (Columbia University Press, 2005), *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (Columbia University Press, 2008), Jia Zhangke's "The Hometown Trilogy" (British Film Institute and Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), and *Memories of Shadows and Light: In Dialogue with the Cinematic World of Hou Hsiao-hsien* (INK, 2012). He is also the translator of several novels, including *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (with Susan Chan Egan) (Columbia University Press, 2008), *To Live* (Anchor, 2004), *Nanjing 1937: A Love Story* (Columbia University Press, 2002, Anchor, 2004, Faber and Faber, 2004), and *Wild Kids: Two Novels about Growing Up* (Columbia University Press, 2000).

Yomi Braester is Professor of Comparative Literature and Cinema Studies at the University of Washington in Seattle. His publications include *Witness against History: Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford University Press, 2003), *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Duke University Press, 2010), and *Cinema at the City's Edge: Film and Urban Networks in East Asia* (coedited with James Tweedie; Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

Pheng Cheah is Professor in the Department of Rhetoric, University of California at Berkeley, where he has taught since 1999. He has published extensively on the theory and practice of cosmopolitanism. He is the author of *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (Columbia University Press, 2003) and *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Harvard University Press, 2006). He has coedited *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998), *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson* (Routledge, 2003), and *Derrida and the Time of the Political* (Duke University Press, 2009). He is completing a book on theories of the world and world literature in an age of financial globalization, and a related book on globalization and the three Chinas as seen from the perspectives of the independent cinema of Jia Zhangke, Tsai Ming-Liang, and Fruit Chan.

Jianhua Chen received PhD degrees in Chinese Literature from Fudan University and Harvard University and is currently Professor at the Division of Humanities, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. His recent publications include the articles "World Revolution Knocking at the Heavenly Gate: Kang Youwei and His Use of *Geming* in 1898" and "An Archaeology of Repressed Popularity: Zhou Shoujuan, Mao Dun,

and Their 1920s Literary Polemics,” and the books in Chinese: *Revolution and Form: Mao Dun’s Early Fiction and the Formation of Literary Modernity* and *From Revolution to the Republic: Literary, Cinematic, and Cultural Transformations in Late Qing and the Republican Period*. He has also published poetry and essays.

Rey Chow is Anne Firor Scott Professor of Literature at Duke University and the author, most recently, of *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (Duke University Press, 2012). *The Rey Chow Reader*, ed. Paul Bowman, was published by Columbia University Press in 2010. Chow’s scholarly writings have appeared in ten languages.

Eileen Cheng-yin Chow is Visiting Associate Professor of Chinese and Japanese Cultural Studies at Duke University. She is also Assistant Director of the Cheng Shewo Institute for Chinese Journalism in Taipei, Taiwan. Her research and teaching include all manner of serialized narratives, press practices and publics, popular culture (anime, fandoms, and media technologies), as well as the origins, formations, and articulations of Chinatowns around the world—which is also the subject of her current book project, *Chinatown States of Mind*. With Carlos Rojas, she is the co-translator of Yu Hua’s two-volume novel *Brothers* (Pantheon, 2009) and the co-editor of *Rethinking Chinese Popular Culture: Cannibalizations of the Canon* (Routledge, 2009). In her non-academic days she has worked as a “foreign expert,” book designer, fudge chef, interpreter, party photographer, film subtitler, and lowly PA on set for Warner Brothers and Beijing Film Studios.

Darrell William Davis is Honorary Associate Professor in Visual Studies at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. He is the author of *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film* (1996), coauthor of *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (2005) and *East Asian Screen Industries* (2008), and coeditor of *Cinema: Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts* (2007).

Michael Eng is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at John Carroll University, where he teaches courses in aesthetics and philosophy and film. He has published on Jean-Luc Godard’s TVideo work in relationship to Deleuze’s *Cinema* and on the film/video installation work of the artists Renée Green, Maryam Jafri, and Knut Åsdam. He has an essay on the racial organization of knowledge in *The Matrix* appearing in the volume *Race, Philosophy, and Film* (Routledge 2013), and he is currently preparing a manuscript titled “The Sense of the Image: The Metaphysical Imaginary in Cinema, Architecture, and Philosophy.”

Poshek Fu is Professor of History at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Zijiang Professor of Humanities at the East China Normal University. His English books include *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: Politics of Chinese Cinemas* (2003) and *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937–1945* (1993), both of which have been translated into Chinese.

Kristine Harris is Associate Professor of History and Asian Studies at the State University of New York at New Paltz and has also served twice as Visiting Associate Professor in Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Chicago. Her recent writing on Chinese

film and cultural history appears in *Opera Quarterly* (Spring–Summer 2010), edited by Judith Zeitlin and Paola Iovene; *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s*, edited by Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco (University of Michigan Press, 2011); *History in Images: Pictures and Public Space in Modern China*, edited by Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh (University of California Berkeley Institute for East Asian Studies, 2012); and *Gender and Chinese Cinema: New Interventions*, edited by Mary Ann Doane and Lingzhen Wang (Columbia University Press, forthcoming 2013).

Tsung-yi Michelle Huang is Associate Professor of Geography at National Taiwan University. She is the author of *Walking between Slums and Skyscrapers: Illusions of Open Space in Hong Kong, Tokyo and Shanghai* (2004) and *Articulating New Cultural Identities: Self-Writing of East Asian Global City-Regions* (in Chinese) (2008).

Jie Li is a Cotsen Postdoctoral Fellow in East Asian Humanities at the Princeton Society of Fellows in Liberal Arts and begins an appointment as Assistant Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard in Fall 2013. Her articles on film have appeared or are forthcoming in the journals *Public Culture*, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, *China Perspectives*, *Jump Cut*, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, and *positions: east asia cultures critique*. Her current book projects are *Utopian Ruins: A Memory Museum of the Maoist Era* and *Cinematic Manchuria: A Transnational History*. She has also made documentary films in China and Cameroon.

Song Hwee Lim is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Exeter. He is the author of *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas* (2006) and coeditor of *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film* (2006) and *The Chinese Cinema Book* (2011). The founding editor of the *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, his new book, *Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness*, will be published in 2014 by the University of Hawai'i Press.

Kwai-Cheung Lo is Professor in the Department of Humanities and Creative Writing and Director of Creative and Professional Writing Program at Hong Kong Baptist University and is the author of *Excess and Masculinity in Asian Cultural Productions* (SUNY, 2010) and *Chinese Face/Off: The Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong* (University of Illinois Press, 2005). Currently he is working on a book manuscript on ethnic minority cinema in China.

Jason McGrath is Associate Professor in the Department of Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, where he also serves on the graduate faculty of Moving Image Studies. He is the author of *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age*, and his essays on Chinese film have appeared in journals such as *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* and *Opera Quarterly* as well as anthologies including *Chinese Films in Focus*, *The Urban Generation*, *The Chinese Cinema Book*, and *China's Literary and Cultural Scenes at the Turn of the 21st Century*. His current projects include an anthology of translated Chinese writings on

film and a book manuscript entitled “Inscribing the Real: Realism and Convention in Chinese Film from the Silent Era to the Digital Age.”

Sean Metzger is Assistant Professor of Performance Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Theater, Film, and Television. He has coedited three volumes: with Gina Masequesmay, *Embodying Asian/American Sexualities* (Lexington Books, 2009); with Olivia Khoo, *Time Signatures: Technologies and Temporalities in Chinese Screen Cultures* (Intellect, 2009); and, with Michaeline Crichlow, a special issue on “Race, Space, Place: the Making and Unmaking of Freedoms in the Atlantic World” (*Cultural Dynamics*, November 2009). He is completing a book currently called “Chinese Looks: The Sino/American Interface and the Skein of Race,” which investigates Chineseness, fashion, film, gender, migration, and performance through four objects—the queue, the *qipao*, the Mao suit, and the tuxedo—during the long twentieth century.

Laikwan Pang teaches cultural studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her books include *Creativity and Its Discontents: China’s Creative Industries and Intellectual Property Rights Offenses* (Duke University Press, 2012), *The Distorting Mirror: Visual Modernity in China* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), and *Cultural Control and Globalization in Asia: Copyright, Piracy, and Cinema* (Routledge, 2006). She is currently working on a new research related to the tensions and mutual conditioning between politics and aesthetics of China’s Cultural Revolution.

Ying Qian is a postdoctoral fellow at the Australian Center for China in the World, Australian National University. She has a PhD from the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, specializing in Chinese cultural history and film studies. She has published on Chinese independent documentary cinema and is working on a book manuscript on newsreel and documentary cinema of China’s Mao era.

Andy Rodekohr is Assistant Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Wake Forest University. He completed his doctoral dissertation at Harvard University on the figure of the crowd in modern Chinese literature and visual culture in 2012.

Carlos Rojas is Associate Professor of Chinese Cultural Studies, Women’s Studies, and Arts of the Moving Image at Duke University, and his research focuses on issues of gender and visibility, corporeality and infection, nationalism, and diaspora studies. He is the author of *The Great Wall: A Cultural History* (Harvard University Press, 2010) and *The Naked Gaze: Reflections on Chinese Modernity* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2008). He is the coeditor, with Eileen Cheng-yin Chow, of *Rethinking Chinese Popular Culture: Cannibalizations of the Canon* (Routledge, 2009) and, with David Der-wei Wang, of *Writing Taiwan: A New Literary History* (Duke University Press, 2007). He is also the translator of Yan Lianke’s novel *Lenin’s Kisses* (Grove, 2012) and the cotranslator, again with Eileen Chow, of Yu Hua’s two-volume novel *Brothers* (Pantheon, 2009).

Louisa Schein teaches anthropology and women's and gender studies at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. She is author of *Minority Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 2000), coeditor with Tim Oakes of *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities and the Reimagining of Space* (Routledge, 2006) and coeditor with Purnima Mankekar of *Media, Erotics and Transnational Asia* (Duke University Press, 2013). Her articles have appeared in *Journal of Asian Studies*, *positions*, *Cultural Anthropology*, *Social Text*, *Modern China*, and *American Quarterly* and she is currently completing a book on Hmong transnational media, "Rewind to Home: Hmong Media and Gendered Diaspora." With Peter O'Neill, she directed the documentary *Better Places: Hmong of Providence a Generation Later* (2012) and is working with filmmaker Va-Megn Thoj on a documentary on Hmong worlds of health and healing. She has been involved most recently in antiracist activism and publishing around the Eastwood film *Gran Torino* in collaboration with lead actor Bee Vang.

Stephen Teo is Associate Professor in the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Teo is a leading scholar of Hong Kong cinema and is now focusing on Chinese and other Asian cinemas in his research. He is the author of *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* (British Film Institute, 1997), *Wong Kar-wai* (BFI, 2005), *King Hu's "A Touch of Zen"* (Hong Kong University Press, 2007), *Director in Action: Johnnie To and the Hong Kong Action Film* (Hong Kong University Press, 2007), and *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Wuxia Tradition* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009). His new book is *The Asian Cinema Experience: Styles, Spaces, Theory*, published by Routledge.

James Tweedie is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Cinema Studies at the University of Washington. His essays have appeared in *Cinema Journal*, *Cultural Critique*, *Public Culture*, *Screen*, *SubStance*, and other journals, edited volumes, and anthologies, and he coedited *Cinema at the City's Edge: Film and Urban Networks in East Asia* (with Yomi Braester; Hong Kong University Press, 2010). His book on global new wave cinemas is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Paola Voci is Senior Lecturer at the University of Otago. Her research focuses on Chinese cinemas and, in particular, documentary videomaking. Her work appears in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, *Screening the Past*, *Senses of Cinema*, and *Bianco e Nero* and in several edited collections of essays. She is the author of *China on Video* (Routledge, 2010), a book that analyzes movies made and viewed on smaller screens (i.e., the DV camera, the computer monitor—and, within it, the Internet window—and the cell phone display).

Ban Wang is the William Haas Professor in Chinese Studies at Stanford University and the Yangtze River Professor at East China Normal University. He is currently chairperson of the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures. His major publications include *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth Century China* (Stanford University Press, 1997), *Illuminations from the Past* (Stanford University Press, 2004), and

History and Memory (in Chinese, Oxford University Press, 2004). He coedited *Trauma and Cinema* (Hong Kong University Press, 2004), *The Image of China in the American Classroom* (Nanjing University Press, 2005), *China and New Left Visions* (Lexington 2012), and *Debating Socialist Legacy in China* (forthcoming, Palgrave). He edited *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution* (Brill, 2010). He was a research fellow with the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2000 and the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton in 2007.

David Der-wei Wang is Edward C. Henderson Professor in Chinese Literature, Harvard University. His specialties are modern and contemporary Chinese Literature, late Qing fiction, and comparative literary theory. Wang's English books include *Fictional Realism in 20th Century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen* (1992), *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911* (1997), and *The Monster That Is History: Violence, History, and Fictional Writing in 20th Century China* (2004).

Eugene Wang is Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of Asian Art at Harvard University. He received the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2005 and the Academic Achievement Award from Japan in recognition of his book *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (2005). He is the art history associate editor of the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. His extensive publications, ranging from ancient to contemporary Chinese art and visual culture, have appeared in *The Art Bulletin*, *Art History*, *Critical Inquiry*, and elsewhere.

Yiman Wang is Assistant Professor of Film and Digital Media at University of California, Santa Cruz. Her book on cross-Pacific film remakes, *Remaking Chinese Cinema: Through the Prism of Shanghai, Hong Kong and Hollywood*, is forthcoming in March 2013. She has published in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Film Quarterly*, *Camera Obscura*, *Journal of Film and Video*, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, *positions: east asia cultures critique*, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, *Chinese Films in Focus* (Chris Berry, ed., 2003, 2008), *Idols of Modernity: Movie Stars of the 1920s* (Patrice Petro, ed., 2010), *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record* (Chris Berry, Lü Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel, eds., 2010), *Cinema at the City's Edge: Film and Urban Networks in East Asia* (Yomi Braester and James Tweedie, eds., 2010), and *Engendering Cinema: Chinese Women Filmmakers Inside and Outside China* (Lingzhen Wang, ed., 2011).

Zhiwei Xiao is Associate Professor of History at California State University, San Marcos, with research interest in Chinese film and popular culture; major publications include *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* (coauthored with Yingjin Zhang, Routledge, 1999) and journal articles and book chapters on Chinese film.

Gary Xu is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He also holds a Distinguished Visiting Professorship at the Institute of Arts and Humanities of Shanghai Jiaotong University. A native of Nanjing, he earned a doctorate from Columbia University (2002) and has wide-ranging interests in Chinese art, film, literature, and psychoanalysis.

His monographs include *Looking Awry: The Unconscious in Contemporary Chinese Art* (2012), *The Cross-Cultural Žižek Reader* (2011), *Sinascapes: Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (2007), and *Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Popular Culture* (2007). He has also published numerous articles on art, film, and literature, and has curated several high-profile art exhibitions in China and Singapore.

Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh is Professor and Head of the Cinema-TV Program and Director of the Centre for Media and Communication Research at Hong Kong Baptist University. Her major publications include *Rethinking the Chinese Film Industry: New Methods, New Histories* (in Chinese, Beijing University Press, 2011), *East Asian Screen Industries* (with Darrell Davis, British Film Institute, 2008), *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (with Darrell Davis, Columbia University Press, 2005), *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics* (with Sheldon Lu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, Choice's 2005 outstanding academic title), and *Phantom of the Music: Song Narration and Chinese-Language Cinema* (in Chinese, Yuan-liou, 2000). Her current research projects include China's film marketization, Chinese *wenyi* pictures, and the early film industry.

Audrey Yue is Senior Lecturer in Screen and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her recent publications include *Ann Hui's Song of the Exile* (2010) and *Queer Singapore: Illiberal Citizenship and Mediated Cultures* (2012). She is completing an Australian Research Council-funded project on transnational large screens, and early publications from this project appear in *Global Media Convergence and Cultural Transformation: Emerging Social Patterns and Characteristics* (2011) and *Urban Screens Reader* (2009).

Yingjin Zhang is Professor of Chinese and Comparative Literature at the University of California, San Diego and Visiting Chair Professor at Shanghai Jiaotong University. His English books include *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (1996), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* (1998), *China in a Polycentric World* (1998), *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai* (1999), *Screening China* (2002), *Chinese National Cinema* (2004), *From Underground to Independent* (2006), *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China* (2010), *Chinese Film Stars* (2010), and *A Companion to Chinese Cinema* (Blackwell, 2012).

Ying Zhu is Professor and Chair of Department of Media Culture at the City University of New York, College of Staten Island. The recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and from the American Council of Learned Societies, she is the author or editor of eight books, including *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*, and coproducer of current affairs documentary films, *Google vs China* and *China: From Cartier to Confucius*.

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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