

especially when it applied to *The Red Detachment of Women*. The protagonists Qionghua and Changqing's love story was deleted by the Party authorities against Xie Jin's will and Xie became "a reluctant recipient" rather than a "collaborator" (p. 126). The "tug of war between Xie Jin and the CCP cadres" in Shanghai and Beijing could be observed as well in the making of *Stage Sisters* (p. 126). In fact, as He argues, the three films examined in this chapter, are all "co-authored works" (p. 134) and his distinct melodramatic mode of filmic style was a product of the "tug of war" between the different authors (p. 136).

This is a well-researched study of five Shanghai-based filmmakers during Mao's China. It will be of interest to scholars and students of Chinese film history, modern Chinese history and the Cold War.

doi:10.1017/S0305741024000687

Revolutionary Becomings: Documentary Media in Twentieth-Century China

Ying Qian. New York: Columbia University Press, 2024. xiii + 305 pp. \$35.00; £30.00 (pbk). ISBN 9780231204477

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As Ying Qian notes early in her compelling new book, although contemporary independent documentary in China has received extensive academic attention, the same cannot be said of non-fiction media from the Maoist and Republican eras. While there are practical reasons for this, not least issues of access and preservation, it has also proven challenging to find ways to make sense of this material's unabashedly political form and content. Qian argues that to do so we must understand documentary as "eventful media" (p. 4): media that actively seek to intervene in the conditions from which they arise. Such interventions may be aesthetic, but Qian emphasizes that cinema mediates – that is, it brings previously unconnected forces into mutual relation – both on and off screen. This definition is central to the book's methodology, which explicitly combines close readings of individual texts with the historical analysis of documentary production culture. However, it also allows Qian to locate non-fiction more precisely within the Chinese revolution. The Maoist principle of the mass line explicitly positioned cultural workers and cultural products as intermediaries between the Chinese Communist Party and the masses. After Yan'an, documentary therefore became a critical conduit through which the Party communicated socialist ideas to the masses, and the masses spoke back to the Party, in a mutually co-constitutive dynamic that defined revolutionary culture. It was this bond that shaped the form and tone of Chinese documentary through most of the twentieth century, until it fractured irrevocably in 1989.

Revolutionary Becomings traces this relationship through six chronological chapters and an epilogue. Chapter one considers documentary's beginnings. Qian demonstrates how the imbrication of early Chinese actuality films with colonialism, transnational politics and revolutionary agitation manifested in their style and content, but also in how film exhibition came to finance radical political networks, with screenings an opportunity to generate recruits. Documentary film culture thus became a way for Qing elites to reposition themselves in the vanguard of political modernity,

building on a pre-existing history of print and still-image culture as mediating mechanisms between China and overseas, and between the government and its people. Chapter two explores the development of the newsreel. Here, Qian identifies the Japanese bombing of Shanghai in 1932 – a global news event – as a “watershed moment” (p. 66). Unable to compete materially with the major American newsreel producers, and ideologically disinclined to their combination of perspectival neutrality and the cult of the cameraman, Chinese filmmakers such as Cheng Bugao developed a docudramatic approach to the bombings that blended actuality and dramatized footage while emphasizing empathy over objectivity and access. Qian argues this experience carried over into both Leftist fiction filmmaking and broader debates in Chinese film theory during the 1930s.

If the first two chapters chart the emergence of documentary to the 1930s, chapters three to five explore the formalization of non-fiction’s political responsibilities from the Second World War to the Cultural Revolution. Chapter three takes us behind the “winning realities” of Sino-Japanese war propaganda films, suggesting how works like Zheng Junli’s *Long Live the Nation(s)* (1941) and Wu Yinxian’s *Nanniwan* (1943) deployed genre and docudramatic performance to build solidarity between film crews, documentary subjects and audiences during production and exhibition. Chapter four explores the “winning temporalities” conjured by the Great Leap Forward’s “artistic documentaries” (*yishuxing jilupian*), which pre-enacted a hoped-for industrial future in the present to galvanize ordinary people’s productive goals – a practice which also translated into, for example, screening documentaries between factory shifts, to prevent workers falling asleep. Finally, chapter five addresses documentary’s role in the production of political knowledge under Mao. Qian identifies three key modalities here – cartographic, inscriptional and playfully expressive – but, as the 1960s progressed, the inscriptional, which allowed for the forensic identification of class treachery through embodied behaviour and appearance, came to dominate. Documentary film became evidence through which to exclude people from social and political life, rather than a medium for enabling mass participation, and its relationship to the Party fell into crisis.

The fall of Mao provided the prospect of a recalibration. Chapter six argues that, from 1976 to 1988, filmmakers sought to reconceptualize non-fiction in ways more open to the people and more critical of the state. Television presented the greatest opportunity for such a reimagination. While the impulse manifests in many television documentaries from the period, including the famous *River Elegy* (1988), CCTV’s *Stories of the Grand Canal* (1986) brings it into focus through a reflexive exploration of the Grand Canal as a metaphor for television’s democratic potential as a media infrastructure. This flowering was brought to an abrupt halt by the crushing of the Tiananmen Movement in 1989. The book’s epilogue lays out the consequence of this suppression: the emergence of independent documentary filmmaking, a movement that repudiated non-fiction’s established role as political mediator. This refusal freed directors to explore formally and thematically, but came at a cost – reduced infrastructural access, state persecution and a restricted public profile – that is still being reckoned with.

It is hard for a short review to do justice to the richness of this book. The scope of Qian’s primary research across multiple languages, combined with her attention to theoretical conversations in multiple disciplines, sets the standard for writing in English on Chinese documentary film history. There is still space for further research, particularly around the range of “useful cinema” before 1949. But the book’s grand narrative also encourages us to think more critically about the role of official documentary in the current moment, and the ways in which it does, or does not, continue to mediate between Party and people. *Revolutionary Becomings* is essential reading for anyone interested in the relationship between non-fiction and political change, inside and outside China.