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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cinema, colonialism, and contact zone: the movie theater and city governance in early-twentieth-century Shanghai

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Abstract

Moving away from the text-centered paradigm in film studies, the present research explores the relationship between the growing popularity of the film in Shanghai during the first two decades of the twentieth century and city governance in the International Settlement. It argues that the rise of movie halls contributed to creating a new kind of crowd that blended Chinese moviegoers with non-Chinese viewers. The emergence of the cinema as a space where people of different racial and ethnic origins encountered impelled the Shanghai Municipal Council – the governing body of the International Settlement in Shanghai – to respond by implementing new measures of public safety and altering its decades-long unspoken rules of segregation in the realm of everyday life. For Chinese enlightenment intellectuals and government officials, meanwhile, anxiety over their fellow Chinese's lack of basic decorum in public spaces arose with the intense intermingling of Chinese and non-Chinese filmgoers under the same roof. Thus, the cinema became a "contact zone" – a space of asymmetrical relations resulting not necessarily from colonists' exercise of colonial power but from the Chinese elite's wrapping of the discussion of movie theater etiquette reform within a political and ideological framework of modernization, patriotism, and anti-imperialism.

Key words: Cinema; colonialism; contact zone; Shanghai; smoking

The cinema is a distinctively urban art and industry. Mark Shiel notes that the cinema not only has the ability "to capture and express the spatial complexity, diversity, and social dynamism of the city," but also plays a key role "in the cultural economies of cities all over the world."[1] For Shiel, hence, the cinema is a socioeconomic institution and a peculiar type of public space in the urban milieu. Following this line of thought, this paper seeks to investigate the relationship between the cinema – not as visual art but as a "historically determined practice"[2] – and city governance in early-twentieth-century Shanghai. We argue that the rise of motion picture theaters in Shanghai during the closing years of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and early Republican (1911–1949) times created a "new kind of crowd"[3] that blended Chinese moviegoers with non-Chinese viewers. The emergence of the cinema as a space where people of different origins encountered impelled the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) – the governing body of the International Settlement of Shanghai – to respond by implementing new measures of public safety that contributed to the erasure of racial and ethnic boundaries.

Historians of Chinese cinema have mostly focused on the role of movies as a key constituent of a "special cultural matrix in Shanghai" and the provider of inspiration for literary

[1]Shiel 2001, p. 1.
[2]Xiao 2006, p. 514.
[3]Vanessa Schwartz notes that mass culture, exemplified by the cinema, "was a means of forming a new kind of crowd," who "believed that everyone might consume the same product." See Schwartz 1999, p. 202.

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modernism.[4] Although such a "text-centered approach" dominates in film studies, a few scholars have turned attention to film exhibition and distribution and their sociopolitical ramifications for cities and the Chinese nation. Zhiwei Xiao, for example, focuses on the imposition of behavioral norms in motion picture theaters by both enlightenment intellectuals and the Nationalist Party (*Guomindang* 國民黨 or GMD) government in the first half of the twentieth century to pursue progressive and nationalistic agendas.[5] Matthew Johnson uses film-related enterprises as a case study to press home his argument that although the motion picture has been widely recognized as a "border-crossing" and "global" cultural product, its capacity to transform culture and society remained "a regional phenomenon."[6] Here, Johnson underscores the relationship between the cinema – as a social space and a cultural institution – and the city's sociopolitical conditions. In a different cultural context, Trevor Griffith, who casts doubt on "a single overarching cultural theory" in studying filmgoing, similarly stresses the necessity of identifying "a variety of social, economic, and cultural forces, within which cinema can be located" to explain "cinema's emergence and rise to popularity."[7]

The specificities of the sociopolitical conditions in late-Qing and early Republican Shanghai resided in administrative fragmentation because of the coexistence of the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the Chinese quarters. Considering almost all motion picture houses opened in the first two decades of the twentieth century were located within the confine of the International Settlement, we focus our attention on a unique form of colonial rule imposed by the SMC. Speaking of colonialism in modern China, Bryna Goodman and David Goodman have called full attention to the "local specificities" of Shanghai.[8] The "local specificities" of colonialism with a Shanghai characteristic, according to Isabella Jackson, manifested themselves in the SMC's multiple functions. As an organ of municipal governance, it emphasized both "decision[s] deliberated on by committees informed by salaried officials" and a "form of democratic representation through speeches and voting on local business at public meetings." As an autonomous colonial city-state, it was "responsible for an extensive and quasi-military police force and a volunteer army." Meanwhile, it operated like "a company board of directors," whose commitment was to ensure the Settlement's conduciveness to business.[9]

As a regulator and administrator of this enclave of foreign residence and governance, however, the SMC did not unilaterally impose its wills upon the dwellers of the International Settlement. Instead, many policies were enacted reactively rather than proactively. Namely, the SMC had to adapt to the ever-changing social, cultural, and demographical situations in Shanghai and its adjacent regions.[10] As James Hevia notes, colonialism has never been a coherent practice but "procedures designed to create order."[11] One important adjustment of the SMC's policy took place during the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), when a wave of Chinese refugees fled to the International Settlement, driving up the real estate prices[12] and thereby compelling Shanghai's colonial authorities to permit the Chinese to reside in this foreign enclave.[13] After that, the International Settlement was better known for a mixed habitation of the Chinese and non-Chinese dwellers in the same district.

Shanghai thus departed from Hong Kong in that the latter was subject to formal British colonial rules and, therefore, "rigid forms of residential segregation" could be enforced,[14] whereas the former was Britain's "informal empire" or a locus to facilitate "imperialism without the costs or

[4]Lee 1999, p. 82.
[5]Xiao 2006, p. 514.
[6]Johnson 2015, p. 685.
[7]Griffith 2012, p. 6.
[8]Goodman and Goodman 2012, p. 7.
[9]Jackson 2018, pp. 4–6.
[10]He 2016, p. 155.
[11]Hevia 2003, p. 19.
[12]Luo 2006, pp. 50–51.
[13]Goodman 1995, pp. 53–54.
[14]Carroll 2012, p. 82.

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responsibilities of full colonialism."[15] As residential segregation was impossible to achieve, as Christian Henriot posits, it was the "social landscape" that was segregated.[16] The blending of Chinese and non-Chinese inhabitants/sojourners in the International Settlement prompted colonists from Britain and other Euro-American countries to consciously deploy a strategy of "self-regulation" and draw a racial boundary. In Robert Bickers's words, "the heightened Britishness of the treaty ports was a rejection of the Chinese world which otherwise swamped them, physically as much as metaphorically."[17] In the current study, one of the myriads of ways to separate the Chinese and the non-Chinese was the SMC's attitude toward the safety of theaters. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the SMC rarely enforced strict regulations against theaters run and patronized by the Chinese despite an acute awareness of those buildings' severe lack of multiple exits and other fire prevention facilities. This laissez-faire attitude was in stark contrast to the SMC's continued vigilance against fire in foreign theaters.

This *de facto* segregation in the realm of social custom and culture was gradually undermined in the opening decades of the twentieth century with the motion picture's rise to prominence as a major form of pastime. After several years of exhibiting films in rented spaces in teahouses and makeshift sites, the first-generation film projectionists and distributors began to construct motion picture theaters in the International Settlement in the mid- and late-1900s to serve non-Chinese audiences. Within a decade, Chinese residents began to join the rank of filmgoers. Beginning from the early 1910s, advertisements written in Chinese paid by foreigner-run motion picture theaters showed up in mainstream Chinese daily newspapers, indicating the cinema's growing popularity among the Chinese and a higher degree of racial mixture in those movie houses. The pioneers of China's film business mostly belonged to marginalized ethnic groups from Euro-American countries or other regions in the world. Motivated by a desire to appeal to their clientele and thereby reap profits, those businessmen were not obligated to maintain "heightened Britishness" or racial supremacy.

Moreover, the film has been a mass culture par excellence ever since its creation: it is mass produced by "industrial techniques" and consumed "by most of the people, most of the time."[18] It has probably been the first entertainment in history to position the audience as the focus.[19] More importantly, early American films, which were to dominate in the market in Shanghai, were produced to serve immigrants in the United States with "little knowledge of English." Hence, its immense popularity "helped break down long-standing patterns of ethnic isolation among immigrant groups."[20] In this sense, the "imputed social power"[21] of film, a modern, urban genre that contributed to forming a new type of crowd that crossed the lines of race, ethnicity, and gender, would pose a challenge to the SMC's unspoken rules of sociocultural segregation. With an intensified mixture of Chinese and non-Chinese filmgoers in the same buildings, the SMC could no longer justify itself in subjecting foreign and Chinese theaters to different rules of public safety and fire prevention. In 1916, for the first time in the history of the International Settlement, a uniform code applicable to at once movie houses, Chinese theaters, and theaters specializing in Western dramas was enacted. The authorities thereafter kept a watchful eye on such practices as smoking in the theater.

Although the SMC officials coped with smoking as a potential menace to public safety in motion picture theaters, the Chinese intellectuals and nationalists were critical of such behavior to promote "modern (that is, Western) civilities in China" to wage "the struggle against imperialism."[22] What those critics ignored was the persistence of smoking in Shanghai-based foreigner-owned and patronized movie houses, which testified to Zhiwei Xiao's observation that the presumed "civilized conduct"

[15] Goodman and Goodman 2012, p. 2.
[16] Henriot 2012, p. 109.
[17] Bickers 1999, pp. 73–87.
[18] Schwartz 1999, p. 7.
[19] Valentine 1996, p. 4.
[20] Ross 1998, p. 21.
[21] Johnson 2015, p. 660.
[22] Xiao 2006, p. 514.

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of foreigners was more imaginary than real.[23] Thus, this paper argues that the higher degree of intermingling of Chinese and non-Chinese audiences in the cinemas gave Chinese nationalists a burning sense of urgency to build up a civilized and orderly image of the Chinese *vis-à-vis* the foreigners under the same roof. Hence, the cinemas became a "contact zone," namely, "the space of colonial encounters," where "peoples geographically and historically separated [came] into contact with each other and establish[ed] ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict."[24]

Bryna Goodman and David Goodman have argued that treaty ports – Shanghai included – were "China's contact zones" in that they were "sites of asymmetrical relations created by the exercise of colonial power on Chinese soil, hosted widely divergent local arrangements."[25] However, movie houses mushrooming in early-twentieth-century Shanghai were more than a miniature version of treaty ports. Rather than presuming that the mixture of Chinese and non-Chinese film viewers inside those buildings generated "asymmetrical relations" because of "the exercise of colonial power" and threw the Chinese subjects under the "imperial gaze,"[26] we argue that such encounters in the cinema-qua-contact zone elicited a sense of inferiority and helped to articulate nationalistic sentiments couched in the rhetoric of "movie house etiquette."

Fire prevention measures in the second half of the nineteenth century

The issue of modern civilities for reform-minded nationalists in Republican China had originally been a concern for fire danger for the SMC ever since the 1870s. In this decade, the confusion and recession caused by the massive exodus of refugees related to the Taiping Rebellion finally came to an end. Shanghai's economy recovered, and its population surged again, resulting in the mushrooming of new buildings within the confine of the International Settlement. Under this circumstance, the SMC pursued an agenda to regulate public spaces – particularly Chinese-style theaters – in the name of improving public safety.[27] To this end, the SMC commissioned Henry W. Lester (1839–1926), a civil engineer, architect, and businessman,[28] to inspect all "foreign and native theatres" – especially their means of egress in case of fire – in March 1877.[29] A contributor to *Shen bao* 申報, a major Chinese-language newspaper in Shanghai, informed its readers of the upcoming inspections and reminded the Chinese theater owners of the universal lack of emergency exits in their buildings that could come under the inspectors' critical scrutiny.[30] Two months later, a joint report filed by the SMC's acting surveyor and Lester was released, and suggestions therein to ensure the Chinese-styled theaters' safety were handed out to "the various owners."[31] Based upon this report, the SMC officially published in June 1877 a fire control regulation particularly targeting Chinese-style theaters, in which the necessity of installing multiple doors, emergency exits, and other firefighting equipment were reiterated.[32]

In the following decade, the SMC's effort to regulate the Chinese-style theaters in 1877 proved to be a failure. During an SMC board meeting on March 6, 1885, the attendees voiced their concerns over the potential fire outbreak resulting from "the want of proper emergency exit" from the "native theatres." Obviously, "the report on the foreign and native theatres drafted by Mr. Lester" in 1877 had never been taken seriously. One week later, the SMC assigned Captain J. P. McEuen to conduct a

[23]*Ibid*., p. 520.
[24]Pratt 2003, p. 6.
[25]Goodman and Goodman 2012, p. 7.
[26]Kaplan 1997, p. 22.
[27]Tang 2009, p. 47.
[28]Xue 2014, pp. 74–77.
[29]Shanghai shi dang'an guan 2001a, p. 19.
[30]"Chayue xiguan" 1877.
[31]Shanghai shi dang'an guan 2001a, pp. 52–56.
[32]"Kanding xiyuan fanghuo zhangcheng" 1877.

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full inspection to find out whether the Chinese theaters were "provided with proper means of exit, and whether recommendations made by Mr. Lester in his report dated May 15th 1877 [had] been carried out by any of the owners of them."[33] Despite a threat to deny Chinese theater owners' license applications were they to fall short of complying with Lester's recommendations in 1877, the SMC expended little effort to enforce the 1877 regulation. In December 1893, a police report complained that the Chinese theaters in the International Settlement were "in much the same condition as they were in 1877": The audiences could not "be rapidly cleared" in case of a panic.[34]

The SMC's largely laissez-faire attitude toward Chinese-style theaters in the second half of the nineteenth century was a testimony to the SMC's different attitudes toward the two types of theaters inside the International Settlement. Not only were theaters serving foreigners and the Chinese subject to different rulings – more complex and stricter regulations for foreign theaters and relatively simplified ones for their Chinese counterparts – the level of seriousness in implementing those two kinds of ordinances varied. In this manner, the authorities practiced a *de facto* segregation of social and cultural lives between Chinese and non-Chinese denizens. In Robert Bickers's words, the racial boundary between the Chinese and Britons in Shanghai could be maintained through the latter's purposeful "distance from Chinese and China in other ways – through their diet, clothing, habits and language."[35] Given the conclusion reached in Lester's 1877 report that Western-styled theaters had, by and large, met the fire prevention requirements,[36] the necessary safety protocols for the Chinese theaters could easily slip from the authorities' minds throughout the mid- and late-nineteenth century.

The rise of motion picture halls in the early twentieth century

The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of cinema as the fastest-growing entertainment and business in Shanghai, as in elsewhere in the world. Although the first-generation showmen usually exhibited short films – usually *realitiés* – for lower-class Chinese viewers in teahouses or makeshift structures,[37] some film distributors and exhibitors with business acumen, such as Antonio Ramos Espejo (1878–1944),[38] began to construct permanent buildings as movie halls beginning from the mid-1900s. Top-end movie theaters, such as the Victoria Theatre (*Weiduoliya* 維多利亞, established in 1908), were initially intended to serve the non-Chinese audience, but soon turned their attention to Chinese filmgoers after 1910. It is worth mentioning that the pioneers of cinema in Shanghai at the turn of the twentieth century, namely the "Spanish, the Italian, the wandering Ukrainian, and the stateless Jew," all belonged to marginalized ethnic groups from the West, who engaged in a risky business of film exhibition to survive and thrive in this cosmopolitan city.[39] Among them, immigrants from Iberia were better known for their monopoly in the "skating-rink business and nearly all similar enterprises" and their acumen of turning attention to film exhibition by 1910.[40] It, thus, comes as no surprise that their motive of maximizing profits overrode the concern of racial and ethnic distinctions.

It was not a coincidence that the earliest Chinese moviegoers also came from a marginalized subethnic group in Shanghai, namely the Cantonese sojourners.[41] One contemporary observer found that

[33]Shanghai shi dang'an guan 2001b, pp. 239–41.

[34]Shanghai shi dang'an guan 2001c, p. 247.

[35]Bickers 1999, p. 102.

[36]Tang 2009, p. 54.

[37]The Huanxian Theater (*Huanxian xiyuan* 幻仙戲院), which now gains recognition as the earliest motion picture cinema in Shanghai, was a temporary structure covered with reed mats. See Li and Hu 1996, p. 17. Also, Qian and Zheng 1984, p. 13.

[38]For a study on Antonio Ramos's life and career, see Escudero 2013, pp. 145–50. Nick Deocampo finds that Antonio Ramos is also credited with being the first film projectionist in the Philippines. See Deocampo 2003, pp. 45–46.

[39]Escudero 2013, p. 151.

[40]"The Cinematograph in China" 1911.

[41]Shanghai-based newspapers considered Hongkou as a "Cantonese" district as early as late-Qing times. See Goodman 1995, p. 16.

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the Cantonese in Shanghai, most of whom happened to live in Hongkou 虹口 or the Northern District, embraced the motion picture as their primary pastime because most early cinemas were constructed in the same district. More importantly, the language barriers precluded the Cantonese inhabitants from enjoying Beijing Opera and other theatrical or folklorist arts in Shanghai. In consequence, the film became their obvious choice to kill time.[42] The movie theaters accordingly provided the Cantonese filmgoers with interpretation services. Helen Theatre (*Ailun* 愛倫, established in 1913, closed in 1916, and revived in 1919), for example, began to hire Cantonese-language interpreters as early as the late 1910s before its management added Shanghai dialect services much later.[43]

Director Cheng Bugao 程步高 (1898–1966) remembered that the clogs-wearing and boisterous Cantonese had constituted the majority of the viewers in a Hongkou-based cinema he usually frequented when he was a college student in the late 1910s.[44] Cheng and most of his film-loving classmates were not Cantonese, indicating an expanded motion-picture fan base among other Chinese groups. Meanwhile, Chen Cunren 陳存仁, a Shanghai native (1908–1990) residing in Shanghai's Chinese city, became an avid film fan since his childhood. When needed, he traversed the entire Shanghai city in order to patronize the moving picture halls in Hongkou in the late 1910s and early 1920s.[45]

Owners and managers of movie theaters were keenly aware of the swelling population of Chinese film fans. The Victoria performed services to deliver films for public gatherings or private parties in Shanghai as late as 1910.[46] In April 1911, the Victoria Theatre published its advertisement in Chinese in *Shen bao* to rivet the attention of the Chinese-speaking audiences. Since then, the theater had its advertisements published in major daily newspapers in Shanghai regularly. The foreigner-run movie halls' capacity to accommodate an increasingly large number of viewers was also enhanced because of a stable supply of electricity in the International Settlement after a major power plant was established in 1913.[47] In this decade, most film distributors and exhibitors felt galvanized by the Chinese residents' growing willingness to patronize the cinemas in the foreseeable future, particularly because of the return of "young Chinese students" from abroad, whose heads were "full of western customs and western ideas."[48] The rise of the Chinese audience drew the attention of American distributors, too. By 1916, movies produced in the United States reportedly made "some headway in China" because they "were gaining popularity."[49]

Such optimism also resulted from a booming economy in port cities such as Shanghai in this decade. Remarkable population growth in Shanghai during the 1910s caused by the influx of immigrants from China's hinterland led to increasingly complex social structures.[50] The expanding film fanbases among the Chinese population and the upsurge in the popularity of foreign-language films prompted cinemas in Shanghai to seek for special measures friendly to the Chinese filmgoers. First of all, virtually all movie halls provided the audience with music. More often than not, the management of a first-rate theater hired a full orchestra to perform the accompaniment during a screening.[51] Some other theaters called for help from pianists to play live music to enliven the atmosphere.[52] Unexpectedly, the cinematograph entertainments afforded a locus for the Chinese audience to hear "the great amount of foreign music" and thereby provided them with an otherwise unattainable opportunity

[42]"Waiguo yingxi yuan yu Zhongguo yingxi yuan" 1922, p. 62.
[43]Junjian 1922, p. 91.
[44]Cheng 1983, p. 89.
[45]Chen 2000, p. 40.
[46]For example, a *Shen bao* advertisement dated July 17, 1910 informed prospective patrons of a garden of film screenings provided by the Victoria. See "Liuyuan kaimu guanggao" 1910.
[47]Sugawara 2018, p. 179.
[48]"The Isis Theatre: New Movie Hall" 1917.
[49]Thompson 1986, p. 74.
[50]Bergère, p. 99.
[51]Xu 1927, p. 5.
[52]Wang 2006, p. 2.

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to cultivate a new taste for foreign-style musical art.[53] It, thus, comes as no surprise that practically all cinemas were equipped with orchestral pits.

Second, an increasingly large number of movie houses hired interpreters speaking various Chinese dialects to help the viewers overcome language barriers. Director Wang Weiyi 王為一 (1912–2013) recalled that the theater in Hongkou he and his family frequented in the 1920s prepared its audience members with two language services, Cantonese and the Suzhou dialect.[54] What Wang remembered could be the aforementioned Helen Theatre, which had long been known for its Cantonese and Shanghainese language services in the first several decades of the twentieth century.[55] A news story published in the early 1920s indicated that the Helen's management expressly assigned a large space of the upstairs balcony for two interpreters.[56]

In the 1920s, interpreters employed by cinemas were paid handsomely. An advertisement published in 1921 in Beijing showed that the monthly salary amounted to 35 yuan a month for an interpreter who worked merely one hour and a half a day.[57] This advertisement revealed that the hiring of interpreters by movie theaters was universal in large cities across China. Existing sources show that cinemas in Guangzhou had long provided their patrons with Cantonese-language assistances,[58] and those in Amoy (Xiamen 廈門) hired Southern Min (*Minnan hua* 閩南話) specialists.[59] For some special film shows, the theaters even ran German and Japanese language interpretation services.[60]

The 1916 by-laws

The mass participation in moviegoing activities beginning in the opening decades of the twentieth century raised new concerns over public safety and health. The potential risks of calamitous fire outbreaks stemmed predominantly from the flammability of films and the inappropriate operation of the projection equipment. A fire incident that took place during a cinematograph show in a building at the heart of the International Settlement in April 1908, for instance, resulted from "the overheating of a portion of the apparatus" and inflicted damage estimated at 10,000 taels of silver.[61] As newly constructed movie houses grew increasingly crowded in the 1910s, the audiences were constantly on tenterhooks while enjoying movie shows. In September 1911, a public panic almost evolved into a deadly stampede inside the Victoria Theatre only because some "thoughtless youths" saw a Chinese man "with so conspicuous a badge as a fireman's helmet" on the spot and then called out "Fire." This incident, which was caused by a simple misunderstanding but still led to "serious injury to numbers of ladies," attested to a pervasive fear of possible fire in cinemas among International Settlement denizens.[62]

The proliferation of high-end movie houses, the growing number of moviegoers, and a deep concern over fire risks in the 1910s were a manifestation of phenomenal economic growth and the fast pace of population increase in Shanghai in the first two decades of the twentieth century. It also coincided with a trend of cinema building across the world in early film history. Beginning in the early and mid-1910s, movie theater owners and investors in the United States instilled into their patrons a mentality to glorify opulence and prosperity in the urban environment and thereby began to construct luxurious cinemas.[63] In consequence, filmgoing was no longer a pastime exclusively for the working class

[53]"China and Music: The Cult of the West," *The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, May 24, 1913.

[54]Wang, *Nanwang de suiyue*, 1.

[55]Junjian 1922, p. 47. Also, Sugawara 2019, p. 75.

[56]Kuo 1923.

[57]Chen 2017, p. 53.

[58]Liu 1933.

[59]Chen 2017, p. 53.

[60]Yujing 1923.

[61]"A Cinematograph Fire" 1908.

[62]"A Fire and Its Sequel" 1911.

[63]May 1983, p. 155.

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but became a vital part of the middle class's day-to-day life.[64] Investors in Shanghai began to "gentrify" movie houses almost at the same time. In December 1911, for example, the newly completed Apollo Theatre (*Aipulu* 愛普廬, originally known as the American Cinematograph Co. established in 1908) boasted of its enlarged proscenium, up-to-date stage fillings, and "well-fitted bar room," and a "prettily decorated tea and coffee room for ladies."[65] As the cinemas themselves had become an urban attraction for the urbanites, "luxury," "orderliness," and, ultimately, "safety" became the selling points in the market.

It was under those circumstances in the mid-1910s that the need for a renewed fire prevention regulation grew more urgent. This was particularly true because not only the vast Chinese population participated in moviegoing activities, but also some Chinese-style theaters either incorporated movie shows into their nightly performances or were remodeled into movie houses. The Helen Theatre, for example, was a refashioned Chinese-style theater originally specializing in the Cantonese Opera.[66] At this point, hence, the line between the foreign and Chinese theaters that the abovementioned 1877 report had unequivocally drawn blurred. Back to 1900 and 1903, when "Chinese Building Rules" (*Zhongshi jianzhu guize* 中式建築規則) and "Foreign Building Rules" (*Xishi jianzhu guize* 西式建築規則) were enacted respectively, the SMC still felt fully confident in separating the two racial groups in the realm of architectural styles and social custom. The fact that the rules for foreign buildings were considerably more detailed than those for Chinese houses attested to the SMC's prioritization of the former over the latter.[67] Such a bias was consistent with the SMC's longstanding indifferent attitudes toward lingering safety hazards in Chinese theaters in the past several decades.

With the high-speed growth of movie houses, in which foreign and Chinese audiences intermingled, the SMC no longer sat well with its long-held principle of *de facto* racial separation. Moreover, two massive fire outbreaks killed residents of the International Settlement indiscriminately in 1914.[68] In July of the same year, the SMC came to realize the inadequacy of the existing regulations on fire prevention and, therefore, appointed a "Special Commission to revise the Building By-Laws."[69] The SMC authorities and the Fire Brigade were optimistic that the "more stringent" building by-laws could help to impose more effective preventive measures against fire.[70] The Special Commission reportedly convened 24 times and held more than 50 unofficial meetings. In December 1916, the SMC published the newest edition of the Building By-Laws, in which the 46 rules in the section of "special rules with respect to theatres, etc." were concerning the regulation of all theaters – the Chinese-style theaters and movie houses included. To be more specific, the 46 rules laid out details about the vicinity and the adjoining buildings of a theater and "the arrangement of the interior of the building," including "all the fittings, passages, gangways, stages," "lighting and an efficient fire curtain, etc." The purpose of the rules was to ensure the "prevention of fire and spread of fire and the safety of the public in case of fire."[71]

The 1916 Building By-Law's section of "special rules with respect to theatres, etc." was, without a doubt, an extension of the 1877 report and the two rules enacted in the early 1900s. Legally, movie houses continued to be subject to the same rulings for traditional theaters. Regulations exclusively on cinemas would not come into existence in Shanghai until the 1920s.[72] In everyday life, the vast majority of newly built cinemas were also arenas for dancing, singing, and theatrical performances during the 1910s. Despite this, the section of "special rules with respect to theatres, etc." differed from the previous regulations in that it was the first ordinance issued by the SMC that crossed the

[64]Ross 1998, p. 19.
[65]"The Apollo Theatre" 1911.
[66]"Ge yingxi yuan zhi yiyue huigu (san)" 1923.
[67]Tang 2009, p. 32.
[68]*Ibid*., p. 114.
[69]"The New Building By-laws" 1916.
[70]"Shanghai Fire Brigade Work: The Constant Problem of Fire Prevention" 1915.
[71]"The New Building By-laws" 1916.
[72]Wei 2015a, p. 77.

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boundary between Chinese- and foreign-style buildings. This breakthrough was achieved principally owing to the proliferation of movie houses, for which reason theaters of whatever forms and styles were singled out as the target of special planning, regulation, and administration. In reality, the SMC continued to maintain a certain degree of segregation of buildings in the International Settlement after 1916: Chinese- and foreign-style buildings other than theaters or cinemas came under the jurisdiction of two separate newly enacted building rules. A uniform set of rules that erased the distinction between the two would not be published until the late 1930s.[73] In this sense, the motion picture theater was the first realm where the integration of different cultures and customs materialized.

The issue of smoking in the theater

Despite the publication of the 1916 building by-laws, the nagging issue of smoking inside theaters, which was intimately related to fire prevention, continued to baffle both the authorities and owners of the theaters. The SMC waited another 6 years before issuing an injunction against smoking during cinematograph shows in June 1922.[74] Although smoking in the theater had consistently been cited in the media in the first half of the twentieth century as Chinese viewers' lack of awareness of the proper "movie house etiquette,"[75] the issue similarly drew public attention and sparked controversies among non-Chinese filmgoers long before the Chinese audience's domination in movie houses. For most viewers and cinema managers, however, smoking was more relevant to the level of comfort a movie hall could offer than to fire control. The management of the Apollo Theatre, for example, boasted of the cinema's robust ventilation system, which enabled "the hall to be cleared of smoke and bad air within three minutes of the time that the fan [was] set in motion" in a public notice of the theater's reopening in late 1911.[76]

Such ventilation systems seemed not to be able to bring comfort to every attendant of the film theaters. In February 1914, an English-speaking resident and film fan wrote to *North-China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette* demanding a ban on smoking to be extended from tram cars to "cinematograph shows and similar places of public entertainment." Although the writer identified himself as a habitual smoker, he recognized "the discomfort and irritation [smoking] cause[d] the ladies and others who dislike tobacco smoke."[77] This reader's letter soon met with objection. Another reader attempted to defend his fellow smokers' inalienable rights by stating, "Many smokers go to a cinematograph or music hall simply because they are allowed to smoke."[78] A week later, the first writer responded that the movie theaters allowed their audiences to smoke "simply because the management in each case [had] grown weary of trying to put a stop to it." He reiterated his viewpoint that smokers' indulgence had given "discomfort to other people present."[79]

As more discussants contributed their essays or letters, and the debate was on the verge of deteriorating into invective and polemic, S. Hertzberg, the Apollo Theatre's owner, stepped in to clarify the issue of smoking from the standpoint of a cinema's management:

> "The management of a theatre must observe courteousness to its patrons at all times, and therefore, it will be apparent that, unless the law stipulates same, it cannot enforce the rule of 'non-smoking' without offending a large proportion, and by allowing smoking, it must necessarily offend another large proportion.
> …our theatre is subject to special insurance rates and we are forced to observe the most rigid

[73]Tang 2009, pp. 31–32.
[74]Wei 2015b, p. 36.
[75]Xiao 2006, p. 524.
[76]"The Apollo Theatre" 1911.
[77]Havana 1914a.
[78]The Humble "Pirate" 1914.
[79]Havana 1914b.

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scrutiny in the operating booth, where only non-inflammable fittings are used, and in other parts of the house also, even to special fire quelling appliances."[80]

Here, Hertzberg's understanding of smoking in the theater differed from those of his customers. Namely, smoking in a public space was unrelated to social morality and did not violate any laws but came under the SMC authorities' scrutiny for fear of its causal relationship with fire.

The growing demands for fire prevention measures that Hertzberg cited became more rigid with the enactment of the 1916 building by-laws, presenting grave difficulties for planners and builders of new or remodeled movie theaters. In April 1918, Americo Enrico Lauro (1879–1937), a film distributor and showman from Italy, sued Tang Qiaoqing 唐翹卿 (1841–1925), an influential Chinese tea trader, for the latter's unfulfilled promise to refashion a Chinese theater into a movie house. Tang leased the theater he owned to Lauro in 1914 with a firm plan to rebuild it into a new cinema. The plaintiff hired an architect to prepare plans twice in 1915 and 1917, but the defendant decided not to abide by the terms of their agreement in January 1918. Among all factors that led to the defendant's breach of the contract, the rising cost was considered to be decisive. Lauro estimated that the cost of rebuilding this theater would have swollen from 12,000 to 15,000 taels of silver.[81] It is conceivable that the exorbitant reconstruction price stemmed principally from additional expenses of non-inflammable fittings and fees incurred by the inspections conducted by the Shanghai Fire Brigade.

The Fire Brigade and the disputes over licensing

The Fire Brigade's central role in the construction of new movie theaters and other public buildings imposed an onerous burden on the already undermanned brigade in the 1910s, contributing to its restructuring by the end of this decade. Initially established in 1866, the Fire Brigade in Shanghai remained a volunteer organization until the 1910s.[82] Volunteering, long recognized as a "civic duty" in nineteenth-century Shanghai,[83] was in jeopardy at this point. During an SMC board meeting in 1915, a consensus was reached that a paid brigade would be assembled following the practices in Singapore and Manila, and M. W. Pett from Singapore would play a key role in the process.[84] By 1918, when World war I was dragging on, and many volunteers for fire service in Shanghai returned to their home countries in Europe, the Fire Brigade of the SMC was facing both increasingly burdensome firefighting work and the depletion of its personnel.[85] Under those circumstances, the Chief Officer of the police publicly admitted that the SMC was moving to relinquish the volunteer system and organize a paid fire brigade.[86] A professional fire brigade led by the newly appointed chief officer of the Shanghai Municipal Fire Brigade, Pett, was assembled a year later.[87]

Pett would find himself to be the least welcomed person among cinema owners and managers in the following decade: he leapt from one theater to another to carry out inspections, give recommendations, and dole out injunctions. On April 26, 1921, for example, Pett signed a letter of warning to the Apollo Theatre on behalf of the Fire Brigade, accusing the theater's management of contravening the licensing procedure. The main concern was the Apollo management's use of the theater, licensed exclusively as a "Cinematograph Hall," simultaneously for "theatrical performances" without an additional theater license. In order to meet the needs of theatrical performances, the Apollo had enlarged the orchestral pit and thereby squeezed the space beside it, where chairs and music stands were piling

[80]Hertzberg 1914.
[81]"A New Cinema Theatre: Alleged Breach of Contract" 1918. Also, "Hekai xiyuan zhi jiufen" 1918.
[82]Li 2002, pp. 1268–69.
[83]Jackson 2018, p. 123.
[84]Shanghai shi dang'an guan 2001d, p. 275.
[85]"Shanghai Fire Brigade: Opening of Hongkew Station" 1918.
[86]"The Fire Brigade" 1918.
[87]Li 2002, p. 1270.

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up. In consequence, the "access to the hydrants and hose" was blocked.[88] The movie house differed from the live theater, according to Maggie Valentine, in that the former had "little or no need of a backstage," and "support facilitates were reduced to a two-dimensional wall and a projection booth."[89] From the standpoint of fire prevention, hence, the focal point of a movie theater was its projection booth, in which the inflammable films and overheated equipment could pose a genuine threat. The presence of backstage facilitates, an orchestral pit, and so forth for theatrical performances in a multifunctional theater indeed complicated the issue of fire prevention.

This said, it had been commonplace for theaters – however licensed – to feature both cinematic and non-cinematic shows in Shanghai in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Colon Theatre, arguably the city's earliest permanent movie house,[90] for example, invited a certain Miss Dollie Keldie, a singer from Australia, to put on stage performances between 1909 and 1910.[91] Aside from performers from abroad, a Cantonese Opera troupe also rented this theater sometime before 1915.[92] The earliest Chinese-language advertisement published by a movie theater in Shanghai was a public notice about the live performances by a motley crew of artists, singers, magicians, acrobats, and dancers at the Victoria Theatre on April 12, 1911.[93] Throughout the 1910s, the Victoria, also known as the Victoria Hall and arguably "the best of its kind in the Settlement,"[94] garnered its profits from both "the cinematograph and vaudeville entertainment."[95] The SMC officials themselves benefited from this theater's facilities and services by holding events, including receptions, public meetings, or disaster-relief/fundraising shows. Invariably, the Victoria, as other cinematograph theaters in Shanghai, presented its audience members an admixture of different performing genres in conjunction with film exhibitions. In the words of a newspaper contributor, what was staged at the Victoria was oftentimes "a Cinema-cum-variety affair, songs, dances and specialties being interpolated between the films."[96]

The interpolation of various live shows during film exhibitions was necessary because all pictures shown were short comedies, action films, or *actualités* before multireel narrative films gained currency in the mid- and late-1910s. Lauro, for example, kicked off his career in Shanghai by showing four short films every night at a Chinese theater in the International Settlement after he arrived in China in 1900.[97] Beginning in 1905, Lauro shot "one-reel pictures of such innocuous subjects as tea-culture or picturesque scenes in Shanghai streets" to further expand his repertoire.[98] Similarly, Chinese-owned theaters also inserted short movie shows in their theatrical performances. Some spoken drama (known as "new drama" or *xinju* 新劇) troupe used a combination of live performances and film screenings to appeal to the audience in the 1910s.[99] Such a practice was still in vogue well into the 1920s, when China's film industry became much more mature, and evolved into "linked plays" (*lianhuan xi* 連環戲), an intermedial genre combining "modern popular drama and film into a single entity by integrating filmed sequences into stage performances."[100] In the 1910s, however, this intermediality was both a business gimmick and a manifestation of the technological limitations of the day: the projector needed some time to cool down between shows.[101]

[88]The Shanghai Municipal Archives, U1-3-134, pp. 24–25.
[89]Valentine 1996, p. 4.
[90]The Colon Theatre, established sometime between 1903 and 1907, was the predecessor of the widely known Hongkew Theatre (*Hongkou* 虹口). Film historians have long misconstrued Hongkew as its official name in the 1900s. For example, Zhang 2005, p. 68; Huang 2014, p. 25.
[91]"Local General News" 1910.
[92]Shanghai Municipal Archives, B-123-5-1261, p. 31.
[93]The advertisement was published in *Xinwen bao* 新聞報 on April 6, 1911.
[94]The Shanghai Municipal Archives, U1-14-5693, p. 76.
[95]*The North-China Daily News*, September 5, 1911.
[96]Samurai 1937.
[97]"Dianying qiye jia Laoluo zai Hu shishi" 1937, p. 400.
[98]"Far East Cinema Pioneer Here: Mr. A. E. Lauro Tells of Early Struggle: First Movie Shown in Tea House" 1935.
[99]Qian and Zheng 1984, p. 20.
[100]Bao 2015, p. 47.
[101]Samurai 1937.

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The inseverable relationship between movie houses and theaters decidedly shaped the cinemas in early-twentieth-century Shanghai. First of all, it endowed those cinemas with a distinctive spatial configuration and architectural style. On the one hand, Shanghai-based movie theaters kept up with the trend of "gentrification" by imitating the exteriors and facilities of their counterparts in the United States. A memoirist recalled that the Victoria looked almost identical to American cinemas he had seen in Hollywood movies.[102] On the other hand, their interiors continued to bear a resemblance to opera theaters. Virtually all were equipped with stages and "proscenium wall[s],"[103] orchestral spaces,[104] and boxes usually on the second floor reserved for privileged viewers.[105] Although some of the cinemas also readied bar rooms and tea/coffee shops to provide food and beverage,[106] cheaper ones permitted hawkers to roam inside the halls to sell snacks.[107]

Second, because of their intimate relationship, movie houses and opera theaters were subject to the city authorities' unified management, as has shown in the "special rules with respect to theatres, etc." enacted in 1916. For the SMC's Fire Brigade, however, the combination of film exhibitions and live performances became increasingly intolerable. Some theaters had their licenses revoked because of their dual functions.[108] The Lyceum Theatre, the finest European-style theater in the International Settlement for stage performances, was consistently denied its application for regular film exhibitions for safety reasons.[109] The Fire Brigade similarly kept a close watch on the Victoria. In December 1917, when the Victoria proceeded to renew its license and request a permit to "hold vaudeville entertainments in conjunction with cinematograph exhibitions," the SMC authorities cautioned that the licensing conditions had become "more stringent," although Victoria had succeeded in passing the inspection when its construction was completed a decade before. The inspection conducted in the same month resulted in a lengthy report with eighteen recommendations for fire prevention, ranging from setting up additional exits, the wiring of the cinema machine enclosure, to the removal of unnecessary rooms. Among them, suggestions of installing a fire door to protect the stage, filling the space between the stage opening and the proscenium wall with approved fire-resisting material, and adding a ventilation system were key to permitting the Victoria to retain its multiple functions.[110]

The requirements of adding ventilation and using fire-resisting materials were evidently intended to tackle the issue of smoking inside the hall of the Victoria, whose management possessed an official permit from the Fire Brigade to allow its clientele to consume tobacco products while viewing movies throughout the 1910s.[111] By the early 1920s, the issue of smoking in movie houses loomed large. On June 6, 1922, the SMC publicized a new directive to ban smoking in all theaters and movie houses.[112] This injunction was immediately greeted with resistance and complaints, especially from theaters specializing in Chinese operas and dramas. A letter sent by the management of Da Wu Dai Theatre (*Da wutai* 大舞臺) to the SMC on June 16, 1922 stated, "the custom of smoking among the Chinese has continued for so long that it is difficult to change." The theater manager then warned that investors of entertainment facilities would consider moving away from the International Settlement, were the authorities to adhere to this ruling. Therefore, the letter's writer advised that the SMC's decision-makers respected the Chinese custom and treated Chinese and foreign theaters differently.[113]

[102]Ke 1990, p. 111.
[103]The Shanghai Municipal Archives, U1-14-5693, p. 190.
[104]The Shanghai Municipal Archives, U1-3-134, p. 24.
[105]Bucai 1928, p. 1.
[106]"The Apollo Theatre."
[107]Xidi 1928, p. 377.
[108]The Shanghai Municipal Archives, U1-2-515, p. 135.
[109]*Ibid*., pp. 135–36.
[110]The Shanghai Municipal Archives, U1-14-5693, pp. 188–90.
[111]*Ibid*., p. 136.
[112]The Shanghai Municipal Archives, U1-3-131, p. 4.
[113]The Shanghai Municipal Archives, U1-3-134, pp. 102–06.

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The SMC, which had carried out a *de facto* segregation policy throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, insisted on applying a uniform rule to all theaters and cinemas in this case. Pett, the Fire Brigade's chief officer, was adamant, "Smoking should certainly not be permitted in this Theatre especially in view of the fact that it is not built of fire resisting material." However, Pett seemed willing to compromise by adding that smoking could be permitted in theaters, cinemas, and other entertainment centers as long as the buildings were "constructed of fire resisting materials and properly ventilated."[114] Pett's ambiguous attitude testified to the ambivalence of the role played by the SMC. Isabella Jackson posits that the SMC functioned as at once a colonial state, a municipal government, and a company.[115] As a colonial state, the SMC was eager to achieve a certain degree of racial segregation, as shown its indifference to fire prevention in Chinese-run theaters in the nineteenth century. As a municipal governing body, it was deeply concerned with public safety when movie theaters gradually became a public space shared by filmgoers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a business, it strove to keep Chinese investors from relocating elsewhere.

The tension among the three roles lent the SMC officials some flexibility in carrying out this new injunction. On the one hand, theaters and moving picture houses – including luxurious first-run ones, such as Olympic (*Xialingpeike* 夏令配克, established in 1914) – were granted permits of smoking if they met the requirement of using "fire-proof material" in their construction.[116] On the other hand, the SMC authorities had to compromise with the staff of both foreigner- and Chinese-run theaters and movie houses. During an SMC board meeting on May 1, 1923, Charles Whittlesey Atkinson, the councilor and general manager for North China of the Standard Oil Co., reported that he had recently paid a visit to the Apollo Theatre and found that "smoking there was very general and there did not appear to be any attempt to prevent." The Apollo, invested and run by Hertzberg, who had staunchly defended the smokers' rights in the abovementioned 1914 debate, allegedly failed to carry a proper license for smoking. When Atkinson called for actions against smoking, other councilors appeared more tolerant, stating, "Shanghai is not and cannot expect to be an absolutely fireproof city." Therefore, most attendants of the meeting expected nothing but "reasonable precautions to prevent loss of life in the event of fire" taken by "places of public entertainment." In comparison, rigorous enforcement of the smoking ban was not the priority.[117]

Contact zone

Atkinson's observation testified to a universal practice of smoking in both high-end, first-run cinemas and cheap Chinese theaters in Shanghai as late as the 1920s, despite the aforementioned Chinese applicant's rhetoric that smoking was a distinctive custom of Chinese viewers that the SMC authorities were expected to honor. It seemed that the Chinese urbanites had an unrealistic expectation that the upper-level movie theaters had succeeded in eradicating smoking during movie shows. For example, *Guide to Shanghai* (*Shanghai zhinan* 上海指南), published in 1922, unfailingly pointed out, "smoking and eating food are not allowed" in such cinemas as the Apollo and the Victoria.[118]

In the same year when the SMC laid down new rules to ban smoking and *Guide to Shanghai* was published, some Chinese film fans and writers began to take issues with the use of tobacco in movie houses as if such conduct notoriously exemplified a pervasive lack of a sense of civic duty among Chinese film audiences. In May 1922, a contributor to *The Motion Picture Review* (*Yingxi zazhi* 影戲雜誌) listed ten repulsive behaviors in movie houses in an essay entitled "The Ten Commandments for Motion Picture Audiences" (*Yingxi guanzhong zhi shijie* 影戲觀眾之十誡), in which the author warned his/her fellow Chinese against smoking inside the theater, not for the sake of public safety, but for fear that smoke might block light emitted from the projector.[119]

[114]*Ibid.*, p. 111.
[115]Jackson 2018, p. 5.
[116]The Shanghai Municipal Archives, U1-3-134, pp. 129–30.
[117]Shanghai shi dang'an guan 2001e, pp. 340–41.
[118]Shanghai zhinan zengding shier ban 1922, p. 28.
[119]"Yingxi guanzhong zhi shijie" 1922.

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Zhiwei Xiao has made a connection between the campaigns against such annoying behaviors as smoking, eating, drinking, and littering during movie shows and the enforcement of "a set of new rules of social etiquette" in China. Xiao argues that the eagerness of sociocultural elites in China to call for Chinese moviegoers' orderly conduct stemmed from a desire to "combat the colonialist image of China as a country of barbarism, chaos, and disorder."[120] Throughout this paper, we have shown that the contrast between Chinese viewers' "uncivilized manner" and "the exemplary behavior of foreigners" in motion picture theaters as envisioned by proponents of new cinema etiquette in China was more imaginary than real. At the least, both foreign-style movie houses and Chinese theaters tolerated, if not outright encouraged, their patrons' consumption of tobacco when shows were underway.

Xiao is certainly right in pointing out that such "trivial concerns" of behavioral norms in public spaces were driven by nationalistic motives.[121] However, it merits mentioning that the issue of Chinese viewers' foul behaviors surfaced and gradually loomed large in this historical junction also because of the rise of print capitalism in cities such as Shanghai. Leo Lee finds that print culture in Shanghai had lent "a helping hand to support the new visual medium of film."[122] Meanwhile, new concepts and practices ushered in by the intellectuals and writers during the May Fourth Movement (roughly 1917–1925) could not have been disseminated without a commercialized publishing industry in Shanghai.[123] In this sense, the rise of multiple visual mediums (film and the print medium) and the popularization of May Fourth, anti-traditional discourse resulted in a resounding call for disciplining Chinese filmgoers' presumed misconducts in cinemas.

Under those circumstances, both GMD officials, such as Ruan Yicheng 阮毅成 (1905–1988),[124] and enlightenment intellectuals, such as Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898–1958), wrote to underscore the implication of moviegoing to "public morality," years before the GMD waged the New Life Movement of the 1930s to discipline Chinese citizens' behaviors. Zheng, widely known for his May-Fourth anti-traditionalism, particularly appreciated the hygienic and orderly conditions provided by movie houses, which not only posed a contrast to the sordid and chaotic environment in Chinese theaters, but also afforded the Chinese citizens an opportunity to learn how to lead a "collective life" and understand social norms.[125]

Thus, in the minds of enlightenment intellectuals, the motion picture theater, a public space characterized by the blending and interactions of Chinese and non-Chinese viewers, performed a function as the contact zone. The presence of foreign moviegoers under the same roof caused psychological stress as if Chinese viewers' conducts were under the stern gaze of "more civilized" colonialists. It is, thus, no wonder that the aforementioned "Ten Commandments" reminded the readers of not forgetting their national identities in the theaters.[126] In the following years, writers consistently blamed smokers in movie houses for lacking *ren'ge* 人格 or "personhood."[127] The discourse of "personhood," which "evoked independent thinking, self-reliance, and individual moral integrity," according to Bryna Goodman, was considered as the centerpiece of a new, modern subjectivity in China.[128] It was, thus, evident that the consumption of tobacco was given a special significance as it was related to China's quest for civilization.

Toward the late 1920s, some luxurious theaters were inclined to set up separate smoking rooms, in which inveterate smokers could smoke during the interlude of a movie show.[129] Meanwhile, cheap

[120]Xiao 2006, pp. 514–19.
[121]*Ibid*., p. 514.
[122]Lee 1999, p. 92.
[123]Wang 2004, p. 134.
[124]Ruan 1927, pp. 1–3.
[125]Xidi 1928, p. 374.
[126]"Yingxi guanzhong zhi shijie" 1922.
[127]For example, Cao 1926, p. 2; A.A. 1931, p. 28.
[128]Goodman 2005, p. 265.
[129]Shoujuan 1928.

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cinemas serving lower-class patrons continued to comingle smoking and non-smoking viewers in the same halls. A contemporary observer noted in 1927 that while lower-tier cinemas were still plagued by their patrons' foul behaviors, first-rate ones began to be exempt from "disorders and clamors."[130]

Here, lower-tier movie theaters were not limited to those run and patronized by the Chinese. In Shi Zhecun's 施蟄存 (1905–2003) short story, "In the Paris Theatre" (*Zai Bali daxieyuan* 在巴黎大戲院), for example, the protagonist (a Chinese man) felt disgusted by the noxious odor from a foreigner who was smoking cigar inside the hall of the Paris Theatre (*Bali daxiyuan* 巴黎大戲院, established in 1926 and renamed as the Paris in 1929).[131] As a second-run movie theater located in the French Concession of Shanghai and owned by a Russian businessman, Russian refugees and immigrants constituted a significant portion of the Paris Theatre's patrons. Hence, it is fair to argue that the gulf between smoking and other "repulsive behaviors" in some theaters and orderliness in others only reflected a weighty social issue of class distinction. The discourse of civility masked the fact that movie theaters were hierarchized not along the line of race but of class. Nevertheless, intellectuals and social reformers, more often than not, tended to wrap the issue within a framework of patriotism and anti-imperialism that were tailored to the concerns of nationalists and modernizers in China. The discussion of behavioral norms in the presumed contact zone of movie theaters, therefore, empowered the sociocultural elite to exercise its cultural hegemony over the lower class, just like other cultural campaigns launched in this century, including the GMD-led New Life Movement.

Shi Zhecun clearly subscribed to the rhetoric that equated smoking inside the movie theaters with the absence of decorum in public by highlighting the unpleasant smell emanating from a German viewer and cigar smoker. Meanwhile, "In the Paris Theatre" allowed for a glance at the male writers' imagination and representation of female spectators in the context of cosmopolitan Shanghai. In the short story, a sense of impotence crept in when the male protagonist realized that female fans grew infatuated with Ivan Mosjoukine (1889–1939) on the screen, deepening anxiety that Chinese women could fall prey to Hollywood's film culture. Interestingly enough, the aforesaid discussion of smoking in theatres among English-speaking audiences in 1914 also broke out in the name of keeping "ladies" away from "the discomfort and irritation" in movie houses.[132] In both cases, female viewers were dismissed as passive, and their spectating position was in peril. Here, women and lower-class moviegoers were comparable in that their filmgoing activities were both considered a risky venture, constantly under male elites' watchful eyes.

Conclusion

For male elites in republican China, namely, May-Fourth intellectuals and GMD officials, the movie theater was construed as a contact zone where Chinese viewers' undesirable behaviors – such as smoking during film exhibitions – were pitted against foreigners' more "civilized" way of filmgoing. The pervasive criticisms of the film viewers' lack of awareness of decency in the public space of movie theaters resulted from two historical trends in the 1910s and 1920s, that is, the May-Fourth anti-traditionalism that associated the Chinese patrons' habit of theatergoing with the nation's backwardness and the film industry's moving away from lower-class audiences and catering to the needs of the middle class across the globe.

In the context of China in the 1920s, the interracial encounter and the imagined behavioral gap between the Chinese and non-Chinese film viewers justified a call issued by the sociocultural elite and politicians in China for a movie house etiquette reform. The same encounter of the Chinese and foreigners in movie houses, however, raised the concern of the SMC authorities for a different reason, that is, public safety. It is, thus, fair to argue that the ascendance of the motion picture as a major entertainment for denizens in Shanghai in the opening decades of the twentieth century

[130]Xu 1927, p. 6.
[131]Shi 1998, p. 159.
[132]Havana 1914a.

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undermined racial segregation in the realm of everyday life and social custom that the SMC tacitly encouraged for decades and led to the reformulation of its regulations regarding the construction of buildings and public safety.

The proliferation of movie theaters across the International Settlement was an outgrowth of a vibrant economy, an increasingly complex society, and a vibrant urban culture during the "golden age of the Chinese bourgeoisie" starting from the 1910s.[133] It is not our intention to establish an over-simplified causal relationship between the growing popularity of the motion picture and the transformation of the SMC's colonial rule in Shanghai. Nevertheless, there is no denying that the high demand for film shows and the mushrooming of new movie halls provided a considerable impetus for the enactment of the 1916 Building By-Laws, in which all theaters – foreign-style or Chinese-style ones alike – were, for the first time in the International Settlement's history, subject to a uniform code. In this sense, the studies on the cinema as an architectural structure and public space and cinema-going as an everyday-life practice allow for a shift away from the text-based approach to investigating the motion picture's sociopolitical implications: cinema helped to effect far-reaching changes to the colonial rule and city governance in early-twentieth-century Shanghai not just because of what was being shown on the silver screen.

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[133]Bergère 1989.

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Appendix

Movie theaters opened in the 1900s and 1910s

The Colon Cinematograph, established between 1903 and 1907, later known as the Hongkew 虹口 Theatre.
The Victoria Theatre 維多利亞, established in 1908.
The Apollo Theatre 愛普廬, established in 1908 as American Cinematograph Co., and rebuilt as the Apollo in 1911.
The Helen Theatre 愛倫, established in 1913.
The Olympic Theatre 夏令配克, established in 1914.
China Cinema 萬國, established in 1914.
Towa Theatre 東和, established in 1914, run and primarily patronized by the Japanese in Shanghai.
The Isis Theatre 上海, established in 1917.

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