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Submitted by: H. B. Howard, Assistant Trade Commissioner.

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MOTION PICTURE NOTES

(Required Report Reference: M.I. VII - 27)

BUREAU OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC COMMERCE

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FILE No.

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" 'The Good Earth' Is Passed By Central Board of Censors "
(Central News Agency, April 24, 1937)

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Details Of Agreement With M.G.M. Made Public: On the eve of the release in China of the film version of Pearl Buck's best seller, "The Good Earth," details of the agreement entered into between the producers, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and the Chinese authorities in 1933 for its production were revealed here today.

It was in 1933 that the M.G.M. officials conceived the idea of making a picture on the basis of "The Good Earth" when this reached the ears of the Chinese Vice-Consul in Los Angeles. He immediately took up the matter with the studio officials asking that certain parts of the story which were considered derogatory to China and the Chinese people be omitted in the film version.

Later the M.G.M. officials sought approval from the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C., which referred the matter to the Waichiaopu in Nanking. Subsequently the Ministries of Interior and Education gave their assent to its production adding, however, that the case would be handled in accordance with the Chinese regulations governing the making of films in China by foreigners.

In December of 1933, M.G.M. sent a part of technical staff to China to take ground shots. This started another series of discussions between representatives of the company and officials of the American Embassy in China on the one hand and officials in the Foreign Office and Publicity Department of the Central Kuomintang Headquarters on the other.

Points Agreed Upon: The principal points embodied in the letters thus exchanged, forming the agreement between the two parties, are as follows:

First, the film should present a truthful and pleasant picture of China and her people;

Second, the Chinese Government can appoint its representatives to supervise the picture in its making;

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Third, M.G.M. should accept as much as possible of the Chinese supervisors' suggestions;

Fourth, if the Chinese Government decides to add a preface to the picture, M.G.M. undertakes to do accordingly;

Fifth, all shots taken by M.G.M. staff in China must be passed by the Chinese censors for their export;

Sixth, the Chinese Government hopes that the cast in the picture will be all Chinese.

On the basis of the agreement, the Publicity Department of the Central Kuomintang Headquarters sent Gen. Tu Ting-hsiu to Hollywood as the Chinese supervisor who, however, was later replaced by Mr. Huang Chao-chin, whose appointment was made following consultations between the Waichiaopu and the Ministry of Interior.

In October 1936 the Waichiaopu received a telegram from Mr. Huang saying that the picture had then already got through its cutting process. Later detailed reports on the making of the picture were received from Mr. Huang by various government organs concerned.

Release Approved: In January 1937 the Publicity Department of the Central Kuomintang Headquarters approved of the release of the picture in the United States with the additional provision that the picture itself must be shipped to China for censorship within forty days.

Last week the picture was officially passed by the Central Board of Film Censors for release in China. While no exact date has been announced, the film is expected to make its debut in Shanghai shortly.

During its three-year production, M.G.M. officials were credited with having observed various points, with the exception of the fourth and sixth items about the insertion of a preface by the Chinese Government and employment of an all-Chinese cast for the picture. The former privilege was forfeited by China as unnecessary while the latter was found impracticable.

The Chinese authorities were highly appreciative of the efforts made by the M.G.M. officials in carrying out their commitments in good spirit."

Film Censorship
(North China Daily News, April 26, 1937)

New Chairman of the Central Publicity Department Appointed:
It is satisfactory to learn that Mr. L. T. Shao who has been recently appointed Chairman of the Central Publicity Department of the Kuomintang and has been giving close attention to the problem of film censorship has been able already to effect a marked improvement in the procedure. It is understood, too, that Mr. Shao is endeavouring to ensure due compliance with the rules under which the censors work but at the same time to eliminate some of those inconsistencies which have attracted the criticism of both foreign and Chinese producers. The film censor has a difficult task and in its performance even consistency is not always possible to achieve. Nor will Mr. Shao be expected with one wave of his wand to create a new heaven and a new earth for long-suffering exhibitors and distributors. It is sufficient just now to let him know that he has the sincere goodwill of the industry and its ready encouragement in the efforts he is believed to be making. If he could manage to glance in retrospect at the list of films on which bans have been placed and could devise some means of modifying the decisions reached, he would be rendering a service of value.

FILM CENSORS NOW LESS SEVERE
(North China Daily News, April 21, 1937)

"Theodora Goes Wild" Passed with Slight Cuts: It is generally gratifying to the foreign and Chinese cinema public of Shanghai and other ports that the censors in Nanking have relinquished their firm view regarding non-essential details of imported films. It is noted that those in charge have dealt kindly with "Theodora Goes Wild," a Columbia film, wherein it had been suggested that disrespect to China had been shown - the valet in this picture was characterized as a Japanese, having a Japanese name "Toki," according to the Hollywood script, which accompanied the film for censoring.

The censors looked askance at the character and inferred that he was Chinese. Upon the local Columbia office having deleted the portion of the film in which Toki appears, Nanking looked favourably on this comedy and raised the ban, with which they originally had penalized the production. Recently, favorable reports have been received regarding films which might seem questionable in the zealous eyes of censors, although no word has been received regarding the Chinese-atmosphere picture, "The General Dies at Dawn."

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1/ I am forwarding in the publications pouch a copy of "The China Weekly Review" which contains an article of interest entitled "Germans Help Japanese Produce "New Earth" "Manchukuo" Propaganda Film.

H. B. Howard

H. B. Howard,
Assistant Trade Commissioner.

Approved by:

J.A.

Julean Arnold,
Commercial Attache.

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It may be of some interest to note relative to the Censor Board's approval of "The Good Earth" that both Mr. Stewart Dunlap, former China representative for M. G. M. (now transferred to South America) and Mr. Morey Marcus, the present manager, contacted this office as to what might be the best lines to proceed along in order to facilitate the possible passing of "The Good Earth" by the Nanking Censor Board. This was some 7 or 8 months before the picture was submitted to the Nanking authorities for approval and even before its production had been completed at Culver City.

Plans were discussed, formulated and put into operation for the best "homeside" as well as local tactics to employ. Much publicity was given in the local press concerning the fact that the picture had been made with a representative of the Chinese Government present during all the months of filming, how M. G. M. was cooperating to the fullest extent in the wishes and advice of this representative in order to gain the approval of Nanking etc. A preview of the picture was given before the Chinese Ambassador in Washington in order to gain his approval as well as screenings in Los Angeles and San Francisco for the Chinese authorities there.

All this was done in order to bring such data to the attention of the Central Film Censorship Board in Nanking as well as the Chairman of the Central Publicity Committee. If the picture were banned for China release, it would have been banned in the face of comments of approval given by Chinese high in authority, and in spite of the Government's official representative sent to the M. G. M. studio in Culver

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City for the express purpose of seeing that the picture complied in all respects to the dictates of official favor.

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