

13404
Submitted by: H. B. Howard, Assistant Trade Commissioner.

MOTION PICTURE NOTES
(Required Report, Reference: M.I. V11-27)

Shanghai Studios Inactive: As a result of the hostilities, Shanghai is no longer the "Hollywood of China". Executives, directors, stars, players, cameramen and other technicians migrated from the local scene to Hong Kong or interior points shortly after the Chinese army withdrew from the Shanghai area. This exodus resulted in workers being scattered throughout the country with many obliged to seek employment in other fields of endeavor. The main force of the industry, however, has turned its efforts to the production of patriotic films, the making of newsreels in war areas and to the organization and functioning of theatrical troupes which tour various sections of the country entertaining soldiers and vividly presenting the importance of national salvation and patriotism to the masses at large.

47
23
Groups of well known movie stars and players presenting plays with a patriotic theme tour the larger interior cities where thousands of Chinese flock to their performances eager for an opportunity to see the cinema notables in person. In this manner appreciable funds are raised, the money being donated to national refugee work, to hospitals caring for wounded soldiers and to other emergency demands. With headquarters in Hankow, these groups of players are under the direction of the "Movie City Touring Theatrical Group" which is believed to be supported by the National Military Movie Studio (a reorganization of the Central Studio formerly located in Nanking) and the Film Photography Section of the Political Training Department of the National Military Council. According to reports, the association produces one patriotic picture each month in conjunction with several

newsreels. The pictures are not only shown in China but according to reports are to be exported abroad for the benefit of overseas Chinese and others interested in China's resistance.

Hankow Making Sound Films of Conflict: According to reports, the Central Motion Picture Bureau will shortly release under its auspices a war picture showing the battle of Taierchwang and scenes inside the city after its capture by Chinese forces. This picture, so it is believed, was made by members of the Central Studio formerly located in Nanking but now removed to and operating in Hankow as the National Military Movie Studio. The studio has already turned out a number of newsreels and patriotic films such as: "Love Our Country", "Protect Our Homes", "The Active Western Front", "Our Last Stand", "China Roars and Strikes", "I Am a War Refugee", "An Air Hero's Death", and is at present working on a feature length production entitled, "The Fall of Paoshan". The studio has also recently filmed an reenactment of the heroic stand made by the "Doomed Battalion" in Chapei just prior to the final retreat of the Chinese armies from Shanghai. It is reported that at present the studio has eight camera crews working in various sections of China in cooperation with Chinese army divisions. It also has three mobile projector units touring the countryside in West China exhibiting patriotic films and newsreels to the farming population.

Chinese Want More Translation-on-film Pictures: The following is an abridged copy of a letter which appeared recently in the North China Daily News. To date only the better or more prominent feature pictures have at times been afforded Chinese translations inscribed on the film so as to synchronize with dialogue highlights and story points. This work is all

done locally and inexpensively. From reports coming to my attention and from my own personal observation these translations, if intelligently made, are highly practical and add considerably to the enjoyment of Chinese audiences viewing American films.

Film Footnotes - Chinese Want More.
(North China Daily News)

"To the Editor -

Sir,

"Many films lately have been shown with Chinese footnotes and from my foreign friends I was informed that they did not interfere with their enjoyment of the pictures. I am sure that much more business would be done in first-run theatres if there were shown more pictures with footnotes, as most of the non-English-speaking Chinese wait for a picture to appear in a second-run theatre, where they have slides explaining the story to the audience--although this method is far from satisfactory, nevertheless it is better than none.

"I am told that in all other countries American pictures are shown with the dialogue completely translated by footnotes. Is the Chinese patronage of these American pictures so negligible that neither the theatre nor the film companies are interested in doing this for the paying customers?

"Being sure that this letter will come to the attention of theatres and film companies, and as their business largely depends on Chinese patronage, I will say let us have more pictures with Chinese footnotes.

Chinese Fan"

Shanghai, Apr. 2

"Snow White" and "Victoria The Great" Reported Drowned in Whangpoo:

On April 16 one of the Shanghai English dailies ran a featured story relating to the latest victims claimed by the famous river. The article went on to report that arrangements had been made for a private showing of Disney's "Snow White" and the British film, "Victoria The Great" aboard the

U. S. S. Augusta, Flagship of the American Asiatic Fleet. At the moment the pictures were being handed by a coolie to the Augusta's launch alongside the Customs jetty, the launch pulled away slightly and the coolie handling the film containers let go - both pictures disappearing into the swift current. Divers were sent to locate the prints but failed to find any trace of the two popular pictures. The article ended with the information that "Snow White" had just been injured and that another print was being rushed to Shanghai via the China Clipper at a postage cost of approximately US\$350.00

While aboard the Augusta a few days ago I asked one of the officers about the story. He said that "Snow White" had not been lost or even slightly damaged although he regretted to report that "Victoria" had met the sad end as reported in the paper.

Outstanding Chinese Film: (See enclosures accompanying this report)

Undoubtedly one of the most outstanding and spectacular motion pictures ever produced in China has recently been completed by the Hsin Hwa Motion Picture Company of Shanghai. The film, under the title of "Sable Cicada", is based on "The Phoenix Pavillion" an incident in the well-known historical novel "The Three Kingdoms." Reported to have taken one year to film, the picture was finished sometime after the outbreak of the present hostilities. The plot takes place in Peiping during the Han Dynasty (180 A.D.). According to studio publicity, the costumes, interiors and furnishings of Chinese homes and palaces, customs, music and many incidentals of that period have been authentically reproduced after extensive research by the studio. Some of Hollywood's publicity methods have been used regarding details of production, namely:

1. There are 478 items of ancient Chinese objects especially made for "Sable Cicada". They are classified under 62 categories.

2. The Phoenix Pavillion set took two months to build and occupied nearly three acres of the company's studio site. (which totals 3.5 acres)
3. The arms used number 1,200 pieces - 20 casting shops being assigned to their construction.
4. Cicada wears 58 costumes. (Not that many in evidence in the picture.)
5. 165 dress makers worked for 3 months on the necessary costumes.
6. The severed head of Chang Wen took 2 weeks to sculpture.
7. Actor King in practicing horse-back riding fell down 14 times. Once was hurt and laid up for 10 days.

etc.,

etc.,

etc.

From an observation of the film, which was shown in Shanghai at the Grand Theater to both Chinese and foreign audiences (and to exceptionally good business) the picture in its technical aspects is by far the best Chinese film I have seen. It is evident that care, thought and sincere efforts for quality and distinction have been incorporated into it by its producers. As a commercial venture for American markets it would be of exceptional interest to students of China, historians, novelty seekers and the dress circle class but to American audiences in general it probably would not click sufficiently to afford it a big time release - especially in the middle West. Briefly I would judge its various departments as follows:

Direction: Good but lacks tempo toward the end. Choice of camera angles an excellent improvement on usual Chinese films.

Photography: Overall quality superior to usual Chinese films. One or two wobbles. One or two out of focus. Lighting good with special mention of effects.

Sound: Recording is far better than most to date. Background level not always constant. Some bad "bloops" which could easily be remedied.

Editing: Carefully done. Some closeups too long but Chinese audiences like their actors to take plenty of time to "think" before they pass on to the next story point. Could be shortened in spots with advantage. English titles, inscribed on the film at the bottom of the screen are employed. Additional titles could be included in most sequences.

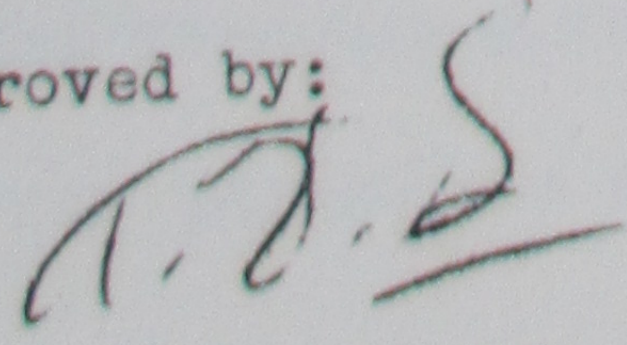
Music: I am not a judge of Chinese music but the score was not harsh or jarring to the senses as most Chinese music can be. Old Chinese songs and instrumental scores were used with pleasing and appropriate effect.

Sets: One of the principal attractions of the picture. A definite advancement over any picture made in China.

Canton-Hankow Theaters Carry On: It is reported that some South China theaters and amusement resorts struggling to survive present emergency conditions such as the possibility of air raids occurring at any time of the day or night have developed a plan whereby the "public assumes some of the possible losses attendant to interrupted performances". During evening performances should a "blackout" take place after 9:30 no refund will be given. If a "blackout" takes place before 9:30 and ends before that time the performance will be resumed. If the "blackout" lasts until after 9:30 the performance will be suspended and no refund made. In other words you probably lose all the way round.

H. B. Howard.
H. B. Howard,
Assistant Trade Commissioner.

Approved by:


A. Viola Smith,
Trade Commissioner,
Temporarily in Charge.

Enclosure No: 41158

NRH:JB