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Cinema Off Screen:
Moviegoing in Socialist
China.

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Chenshu Zhou's *Cinema Off Screen: Moviegoing in Socialist China* is a theoretically innovative and empirically grounded book that takes as its central focus the history, experience, and memory of moviegoing in socialist China. Since the publication of Jay Leyda's *Dianying: Electric Shadows, an Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* in 1972, research on cinema in socialist China has been dominated by critical analyses of narrative, aesthetic, and performative configurations onscreen, in order to understand the complex relationship between politics and art (Clark 1987; Wang 2014; Chan 2019; Lu 2020). *Cinema Off Screen* shifts our attention away from the film world on screen to film exhibition and moviegoing that were embedded in the everyday life of ordinary Chinese people from 1949 to the early 1990s. It thus forms part of a growing body of scholarly work in the field of new cinema history that seeks to move beyond text-based film history to reveal instead the social history of moviegoing, and everyday peoples' experiences of cinema. Notably, Zhou's study also pushes the boundaries of critical practice in this field. Through her ingenious engagement with the concept of "interface" in new media and communication studies, Zhou reframes film exhibition as "a system of interfaces." Consequently, it reconceptualises reception as "a more general state of interfacing in the presence of films" (p. 13). This analytical shift results in a refreshingly informed account of moviegoing in socialist China, which brings the oft-neglected "off screen" or non-filmic interfaces such as the exhibition environment and the screening apparatus into the critical purview.

More than a conceptual tool, "interface" provides an organisational framework to structure the messy and fragmented history and memory of film exhibition and moviegoing into six chapters dedicated to a particular set of "off screen" interfacing dynamics. The first three chapters investigate how the various film exhibition interfaces were institutionalised through a combination of top-down and bottom-up initiatives. Chapter One discusses the

spatial configuration of film exhibition in the newly established socialist state. It shows how the film exhibition network was expanded from sinicized cinemas to mixed-function workers' clubs and rural exhibition sites set up by mobile projection teams. Zhou interprets these exhibition outlets as "public interfaces that mediated socialist ideals of mass access and mass culture" (p. 50-1), crucial for developing propaganda space in China. Chapter Two examines how the projectionist undertook arduous journeys to bring films to audiences in remote areas and how his/her labouring body attracted the spectator's gaze. The author argues that the visible body of the projectionist, insofar as it personified socialist values, "became an interface of ideology constantly foregrounded for attention and celebration" (p. 57). The next chapter takes particular interest in the projectionist's role as the mediator of cinematic experience. Focusing on the projectionist's use of non-cinematic media technologies, for instance, projecting slides before film screening and delivering live lectures amidst screening, it proposes to understand film exhibition as a multimedia institution of audiovisual education in which the medium of film is decentred.

The following three chapters examine the interfacing between the spectatorial body and the viewing environment. In particular, they present a multifaceted picture of Chinese moviegoers' encounters with open-air cinema (*lutian dianying* 露天電影), a prominent mode of film exhibition in socialist China. Chapter Four gives serious consideration to 看熱鬧 (*kan renao*), an everyday phrase that Chinese audiences often use to highlight the lively, bustling, and exciting atmosphere surrounding open-air screenings. To foreground this unique aspect of cinematic experience, Zhou coins a critical term, "atmospheric spectatorship" (p. 105), to describe a mode of cinematic experience characterised by the embodied presence in an open, porous, and unpredictable exhibition environment. Chapter Five highlights the physical discomforts that ordinary Chinese were willing to endure during the moviegoing process, such as standing through open-air screenings despite the freezing temperature. Zhou argues that such discomfort was sublimated via a revolutionary structure of feelings as the audience's active and rational choice, which consequently shaped their memories of socialist moviegoing. The last chapter discusses physical and tactile interactions between audiences and the film screen. Interesting vignettes about improvised, creative, unrestrained, and undisciplined engagement with the screening apparatus abound. Who would forget those spirited kids who slung mud at the screen to mark a villainous character, and consequently brought on their mothers the trouble of washing, drying, ironing, and folding the screen?

Zhou should be applauded for her effective use of an eclectic variety of primary sources. In addition to utilising government documents, popular film magazines, and trade journals, her attentive engagement with fictional accounts of moviegoing in short films as well as audience testimonials drawn from memoirs and interviews generates novel research questions about moviegoing, a long-neglected aspect of Chinese cinema. Individual profiles containing biographical highlights of 60 interviewees from different generations and geographical regions in China are included in a most welcome and engaging appendix.

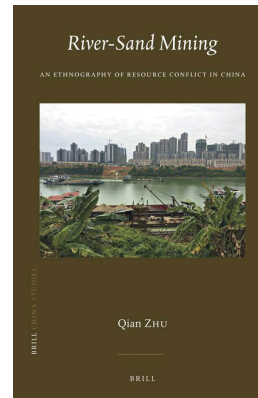
Written with clarity and eloquence, *Cinema Off Screen* highlights moviegoing as an important part of the social texture of China

under socialism. The audience's cinematic experience can by no means be reduced to an experience of films, let alone passive reception of political indoctrination. In addition to shedding new light on the social history of China, Zhou's book represents a valuable and successful example of a decolonial approach to film theories. It shows that Chinese socialist cinema provides fertile ground for scholars to question and revise normative film theories, many of which take the experience of Western theatregoing movie audiences as their starting point.

In short, *Cinema Off Screen* is a well-researched, engaging, and thought-provoking addition to the scholarship. It will appeal to scholars and students in film and media studies and China studies.

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River-sand Mining:
An Ethnography of
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China is a resource-rich country hosting a large variety of mineral resources, and the extractive industries play important roles in the local economy of many regions. But the environmental, economic, and particularly sociopolitical impacts of the extractive industries have received limited attention from scholarly circles. Against this backdrop, *River-sand Mining: An Ethnography of Resource Conflict in China* is a much-needed study on the sociopolitical impacts of mineral extraction in contemporary China. Among the more than 200 types of minerals actively explored in China, this book focuses on river sand, a commonly seen mineral that is widely used in construction projects. Taking an ethnographical approach and based on extensive field research in multiple localities of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the author provides a panoramic view of the political ecology of river-sand mining in local China and rich empirical details about the motives and behaviours of various stakeholders involved in the mining business, including the legal and illegal miners, indigenous villagers, local government officials, etc.

The book contains eight chapters. Except for the introduction and conclusion chapters and the second chapter, which introduces the research design and data sources, the other five empirical chapters are organised around some major aspects and stakeholders of the river-sand business. Chapter Three discusses the commodification of river sand and the ecological consequences of river-sand mining, which explains why river-sand mining has become a lucrative business in recent decades and how it has given rise to frequent resource conflicts in the mining areas. This chapter sets the background for the analysis in the following chapters. Chapter Four further offers the Chinese government's project-based development and massive infrastructural construction as an explanation for why sand has become a widely sought-after commodity and has seen rising prices that have attracted legal and illegal miners into the business. Despite some interesting anecdotes about rural infrastructural construction,