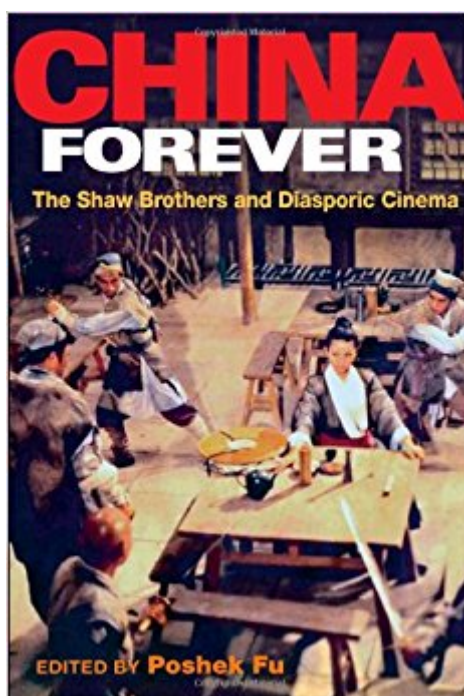


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China Forever: The Shaw Brothers And Diasporic Cinema (Pop Culture And Politics Asia PA)



Synopsis

Started in Shanghai in the 1920s, the legendary Shaw Brothers Studio began to dominate the worldwide Chinese film market after moving its production facilities to Hong Kong in 1957. Drawing together scholars from such diverse disciplines as history, cultural geography, and film studies, *China Forever* addresses how the Shaw Brothers raised the production standards of Hong Kong cinema, created a pan-Chinese cinema culture and distribution network, helped globalize Chinese-language cinema, and appealed to the cultural nationalism of the Chinese who found themselves displaced and unsettled in many parts of the world during the twentieth century. Contributors are Timothy P. Barnard, Cheng Pei-pei, Ramona Curry, Poshek Fu, Lane J. Harris, Law Kar, Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, Lilly Kong, Siu Leung Li, Paul G. Pickowicz, Fanon Che Wilkins, Wong Ain-ling, and Sai-shing Yung.

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Customer Reviews

"This instructive book will be a pleasure for seasoned scholars and amateurs of Hong Kong cinema alike. Extremely useful for Asian cinema courses, this first book-length study of the Shaw Brothers--who were pioneers in the Chinese language and trans-Asian commercial film industry--provides valuable cultural history and global context." --Tonglin Lu, author of *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas in Taiwan and Mainland China* "An impressive, in-depth inquiry into the historical mutations, cultural innovations, and political implications of the rise and development of the Shaw Brothers' movie empire. Of the many volumes on Hong Kong movie industries, this is

the first to focus solely on the history of the Shaw Brothers." --David Der-wei Wang, author of *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China*

Started in Shanghai in the 1920s, the legendary Shaw Brothers Studio began to dominate the worldwide Chinese film market after moving its production facilities to Hong Kong in 1957. Drawing together scholars from such diverse disciplines as history, cultural geography, and film studies, *China Forever* addresses how the Shaw Brothers raised the production standards of Hong Kong cinema, created a pan-Chinese cinema culture and distribution network, helped globalize Chinese-language cinema, and appealed to the cultural nationalism of the Chinese who found themselves displaced and unsettled in many parts of the world during the twentieth century. Contributors are Timothy P. Barnard, Cheng Pei-pei, Ramona Curry, Poshek Fu, Lane J. Harris, Law Kar, Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, Lilly Kong, Siu Leung Li, Paul G. Pickowicz, Fanon Che Wilkins, Wong Ain-ling, and Sai-shing Yung.

The Shaw Brothers is one of the most important film studios in the history of Asian cinema. Their influence on pan-Asian entertainment cannot be overstated. Though Celestial Pictures bought the rights to the entire Shaw Brothers film library (US\$84 mil) and started releasing them in 2002 (for years before people had to rely on bootlegs to watch their films), it took until 2008 for an English-language book dedicated to this studio to be published here in the States (*The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study* was released earlier in Hong Kong by the HKFA.) "*China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*" states that "This is the first English-language book devoted to the study of a single Chinese-language film studio in a global historical context." It is far from definitive with a few gargantuan omissions. In the collection of essays it has not one chapter dedicated on either of the two most famous of the Shaw Brothers oeuvre - the Mandarin wuxia and kung fu movies. Poshek Fu missed a golden opportunity with this mistake. This book also completely ignores the exploitation cinema that included such cult hits as *Black Magic*, *Boxer's Omen* and *Killer Snakes*. All three of these genres were crucial in transnational sales. However for students of Hong Kong cinema and especially for interest of those in the Shaw Brothers this is still a valuable book with several excellent essays and a couple of questionable value. When dealing with collections of short essays the quality of the whole should be determined by the editor. Unfortunately, when the introduction by Editor Poshek Fu contains a few errors and information that does not coincide with other authors this could be construed as an inauspicious foreshadow of things to come. He makes a couple of minutia type errors like stating the founding of Tianyi is 1925

as opposed to the other authors information and the Shaw Brothers website of 1924 (he also translate Tianyi as Number One instead of the authors translation of Unique). He also makes more egregious mistakes like dating Five Fingers of Death at 1965 (it was 1972) and stating on Cheng Pei-peï "After a long retirement from acting, she recently returned to the screen with the role of Jade Fox in Ang Lee's Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." He makes it seem that she just recently came back to acting after a long retirement, when in fact (and even mentioned in her essay) that she came back in Painted Faces (1988) and even had over 10 acting appearances between that film and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. Fortunately this is not indicative of the majority of the material. There are several fascinating chapters on the Shaws Cantonese cinema, their musicals, their wenyi (loosely known as melodrama) films and their malay films - most of which are not on DVD. These discuss the importance of the dialect cinema, the Shaws rival company MP & GI and the history of The Shaw Brothers - how they thought global and acted locally. There is so much useful information on the earlier period of the Shaw Brothers, though there remains much to be learned from the unreleased films. Then there are two chapters that mostly focus on a specific film: one on Hong Kong Nocturne (1967) and Love Eterne (1963) - I will probably find these more worthwhile after watching those movies. There are two out-of-place chapters with the first being "Black audiences, blaxploitation, and Kung Fu films" which has very little to discuss on the Shaw Brothers (though a nuanced look at blaxploitation) and focuses more on Golden Harvest and Bruce Lee. The second "Shaw Brothers Cinema and the Hip-Hop Imagination" which despite its title has very little to do with the titular studio except for the movie "The 36th Chamber of Shaolin" and its relation to the hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan. Both of these could be useful in other collections, but their inclusion here seems problematic because of the exclusion of the genres that I mentioned earlier. Luckily, the final chapter is an excellent, albeit too short essay by Hong Kong actress Cheng Pei-peï: "Reminiscences of the Life of an Actress in Shaw Brothers' Movietown" which pretty much describes the chapter. Her feelings are so positive that they are infectious, even though she talks about several suicides that happened on Movietown (Qin Jian and Li Ting) that there is darker side to this movie studio left unexplored by this book. While not perfect, I expect many fans of the Shaw Brothers to want to add this volume to their library. Several of the chapters are worth having for reference and rereading. However, there is still an opening for an English language edition on the Shaw Brothers to be much more inclusive and cohesive. Now who is going to write it?

This book is a delightful and informative insight into the world of the Shaw Brothers Studio. Besides being synonymous with kung fu films, many of the chapters include a fascinating history of the Shaw

family and their beginnings and rise in the entertainment industry. At the peak of their globalization, their film output was numerous throughout China and Southeast Asia. One of the chapters I found noteworthy was a successful film the studio made in the 1960s called *The Love Eterne*. Based from an opera, the film's plot and characters not only was made interesting cinematically but also touched millions of moviegoers. Although many, such as myself, would find the kung fu chapters the highlight of the book (and since most of us remembered watching the Shaw Brothers kung fu films on television on a weekend afternoon), the chapters not discussing kung fu are just as important and significant. I highly recommend this book. It is a fascinating study and read, particularly for readers who are interested in learning about global filmmaking and cinema. And be sure to read the very last chapter! Actress Cheng Pei-Pei (from the King Hu classic *Come Drink with Me*) adds her memorable moments of her early days working at the Shaw Brothers Studios.

Great read, very academic. Could be a textbook for film.

I'm a Shaw fan and old school martial arts films. And this book does a great job in providing the histories of the Run Run Shaw productions.

well researched book interesting history how the shaw brothers started. but did expect to have complete film list of their many films so i could try to find and buy. bit heavy going, not a film guide but a good history book of early cinema in china.

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