

Nan Hu

The 1957 Asian Film Week: An Alternative Imagination of “Asian Cinema”

Drawing on archival materials at Shanghai Municipal Archives, this paper traces the forgotten history of the Asian Film Week held in China in 1957. It engages with two recent discussions of cultural politics during the Cold War era. First, studies on Chinese cinematic relationships with the world during the Cold War either highlight the Soviet influence on or the Western elements in Chinese cinema, but ignored the cinematic interconnectedness and cooperation between China and other Asian countries. Second, there is a growing interest in the network among anticommunist filmmakers in Asia, especially the Asia – Pacific Film Festival from the 1950s to the 1970s, leaving the efforts and experiments from the other side untouched. With a historical examination of the 1957 Asian Film Week held by and in China, this paper suggests that the models of Sino – Soviet alliance and Western influence may not cover all the practices of cinematic exchange between China and the world during the Cold War, and the imagination of “Asian Cinema” did not limit itself to one version only. Screening films from 15 Asian countries simultaneously in 10 Chinese cities, this Film Week became a most prominent cultural event in the late 1950s China. This paper traces the emergence and development of Asian Film Week in the context of not only the marginalization of Asian films in Western and Soviet film festivals, but also the efforts of the “free Asia” to claim “Asian Cinema” or “Asianness” during the Cold War. It investigates how and to what extent this Film Week as a conscious attempt acted to build an alliance among Asian filmmakers, articulate anti – imperialist agenda and aesthetics, and construct a transnational “Asian cinema” as an alternative to Hollywood, Soviet cinema, and the other “Asian cinema” from the anti – communist bloc.