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## Influence of Soviet Union on Early Documentaries in China

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### Abstract

Documentary follows the idea of recording facts, and truly shoots the unrepeatable time flow, which has irreplaceable documentary value and practical significance. Because of its special political relationship with the Soviet Union, China had a very close exchange and study with it in politics, economy, and culture and so on for a long period of history. The early Chinese documentaries were greatly influenced by the Soviet Union, which included ideas, structures, aesthetics, functions and other aspects. This influence was of great significance to the future development of Chinese documentaries. But scholars' research on Chinese documentaries mostly concentrated after 1949 (the founding of the People's Republic of China), they paid little attention to documentaries during the Republic of China. In fact, the Republic of China was the initial stage of the development of Chinese documentary. The social environment and political pattern in this period were crucial to the formation and development of Chinese documentary films. This paper will comprehensively sort out the process of Chinese documentary films influenced by the Soviet Union from 1911 to 1966 from two aspects, explain its historical reasons, and analyze its strengths and weaknesses, so that reader can have a clearer, deeper and more comprehensive understanding of this.

**Keywords:** China, Soviet Union, documentary, influence, history, cinema, film.

### 1. Introduction

China's documentary has been inseparable from politics since its birth. The earliest documentary creators in China were mainly patriots, private capitalists and politicians. They expressed their consciousness and opinions by using the propaganda and education functions of documentaries either out of patriotic enthusiasm, or out of concern for the revolution, or out of contention for leadership authority. In the traditional conception of the documentary, cinema was understood as a reflection of reality and became a key tool of war propaganda. The first Chinese documentary Wuhan War was showed on December 1st, 1911. It was a documentary recording the Revolution of 1911, and some scholars called it newsreel, because it was mainly responsible for the propaganda function of news reports at that time. The Revolution of 1911 overthrew the rule of the Qing Dynasty. On January 1, 1912, the Republic of China was founded. From 1912 to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the country was almost always in a state of extremely chaotic wars, including warlords' melee, civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, and War of Resistance against Japan and so on, and in a short period of 37 years, the government of the Republic of China replaced 21 leaders. In this special historical environment, Chinese documentaries have been closely related to politics and war since its birth. For a long time, the main duty of Chinese documentaries was to record political struggles and national wars.

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Different from the early documentaries in the western countries, the main content of the early Chinese documentaries was not the electrical industry and outdoor scenery, but its ideological attribute and function was as a tool of political propaganda and a weapon of national war. The early documentary in the Republic of China was almost monopolized by the United States and other western countries, and the intervention of the Soviet Union broke this pattern. "From 1912 to 1949, the central government of the Republic of China failed to exercise effective jurisdiction over the whole country. There were various forces or groups in China, which became the main internal reason for the multi-subjects of the Republic of China's foreign relations. In this respect, the Soviet Union's relations with China were the most representative. In addition to its contacts with the central government and local governments of the Republic of China, the Soviet Union also had close ties with the Communist Party of China, which made Sino-Soviet relations in the Republic of China the most complicated of China's foreign relations at that time" (Su, Lipeng, 2018: 6). To analyze the history of the Soviet Union's influence on early Chinese documentaries, we must stand in the historical perspective and discuss it from the two largest ruling parties in the Republic of China: the Kuomintang and the Communist Party.

## 2. Materials and methods

The early Chinese documentary not only recorded the precious history of China's transition from feudal society to socialist society, but also reflected the development history of Chinese documentary itself. The development of Chinese documentary was deeply influenced by the Soviet Union, but the process was tortuous and complicated. To deeply understand the development of Chinese documentaries, we must restore the reason and process of China's learning from Soviet documentaries from a historical perspective and analyze its successful factors. In the process of creation, this paper collects, reads, analyzes and sorts out relevant books and documents, makes in-depth analysis and research on materials in China, Russia and even other countries, integrates and sums up the existing achievements of relevant scholars, and finally draws a conclusion.

## 3. Discussion

### *Kuomintang documentary*

Documentary films have long been the medium used by activist filmmakers and political advocacy groups to try to raise awareness for a particular cause (Stoddard, Chen, 2018). This practice is as old as the medium itself (Rotha, 1952). Documentary, as a discourse, as a rhetorical artifact, is constantly declaring itself to be the ancillary of a superior reality allegedly existing outside of narration and independently of its being narrated; however, in fact, it actually creates and not merely reflects a meaningful world that only exists as a purposeful configuration in the documentary and discursive realm (Carrera, 2021). In the 1920s, Chinese documentaries began to be influenced by the Soviet Union. The first person to accept and learn from the Soviet documentary model was Sun Yat-sen, the first president of the Republic of China. On October 6, 1923, Borodin, an international Communist Party member of the Soviet Union, arrived in Guangzhou. Prior to this, there was basically no substantive connection between the central governments of the two countries, but there were more contacts between the consular offices of the Soviet Union (Soviet Russia) and the local authorities of China in the northeast and Xinjiang (Su, LiPeng, 2018: 7).

On October 18, Sun Yat-sen appointed Borodin as the chief political adviser of the Kuomintang government, helped the reorganization of the Kuomintang, and agreed that the Soviet Union would develop the Communist Party within the Kuomintang and establish Whampoa Military Academy. After the May 4th Movement, Sun Yat-sen felt the power of mass movement and ideological propaganda. He thought: "Although the Qing government has been eradicated for thirteen years, the revolution has not been completely successful, with no results. Why is this? Simply put, it is because of the lack of effort in propaganda and struggle" (Xiaoyi, 1989). In the party's program accepted at the VIIIth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, in March 1919, the cinema was identified as one of the main means through which the ideological work of the party could be furthered. Special priority was to be given to the making of newsreels, a genre that was to become the party's faithful servant in the dissemination of its propaganda for many decades (Clarke, Seksenbayeva, 2017a). "The formation of Sun Yat-sen's propaganda concept was influenced by Russia to some extent. At that time, the victory of Russia's October Revolution inspired Sun Yat-sen greatly, and "taking Russia as a teacher" became his important policy concept.

In January, 1924, when the Kuomintang was held, Sun Yat-sen determined the three major policies of uniting Russia, uniting the Communist Party and helping the peasants and workers, and reorganized the Kuomintang to prepare for the Huangpu Military Academy" (Fei, 2021).

At that time the new Bolshevik authorities were highly appreciative of the value of film in providing an exact record of events and in offering an efficient vehicle for public instruction that could be used alongside periodicals and newspapers. Indeed, film seemed to have a mass character appropriate for a socialist society. As early as March 4, 1918, the Presidium of the Moscow Council of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies had passed a resolution placing film enterprises under official control (Clarke, Seksenbayeva, 2017b).

In 1924, the Soviet documentary *Lenin's Funeral* was shown in China, and then more and more Soviet documentaries were shown in China. Its profound content and new form inspired Chinese progressive filmmakers. Sun Yat-sen realized that documentary was more advantageous in propaganda and education than newspapers, because the literacy rate of the people was low at that time, and most people couldn't get information directly from newspapers. A documentary can be characterized as a film that enables its audience to form perceptual beliefs concerning the events depicted (Terrone, 2020). Sun Yat-sen believed that it was a way to save the country by educating the people through documentary, and then making them accept an idea or ideology. "Nationalists headed by Sun Yat-sen formed a relatively mature propaganda concept on the basis of the propaganda concept of Soviet Russia" (Hailong, 2021).

With the deepening of exchanges between the two countries, Soviet filmmakers began to come to China to shoot documentaries. In 1925, the film crew of the Soviet Union came to China to film a documentary *The Great Flight and China's Civil War*. The director is V.A. Schneiderov, and the photographer is F.B. Blum. The film records the first flight of the Soviet homebuilt aircraft expedition from Moscow to China via Mongolia. Before that, all the western countries that came to China to shoot documentaries were the United States, Britain, and France and so on. They not only controlled the documentary market in China, but also shot some backward and ignorant Chinese people with a curious eye, which hardly reflected the real situation of the Chinese people at that time. Soviet documentary workers came to China to make films, which changed the monopoly of western countries on Chinese documentaries. This documentary showed the real war situation of China to western countries for the first time. "*Pravda* of the Soviet Union once gave a high evaluation to this film, thinking that it is not a news film that is usually understood, and it has reached the grand scale of social life epic" (Weijin, 2013: 54).

At that time, the Soviet documentary was very superior in ideological content and artistic expression, while the Chinese documentary was still in its infancy. It was just a kind of news report using film as the media, and its production level was very low, and its artistry and ideological content were far behind those of other countries. At that time, Soviet film artists made great achievements in theoretical research and creative practice, and many countries were learning from Soviet documentaries. "Today most commentators agree that the documentary film in Poland stemmed from the activities of pre-war film-makers who during the war worked in the Soviet Union." (Misiak, 2018). As the Kuomintang government established its political position of alliance with the Soviet Union, Chinese documentary workers began to accept and learn the ideological mode and creative methods of Soviet documentaries.

However, the cooperative relationship between China and the Soviet Union did not last long. In 1927, China and the Soviet Union broke off diplomatic relations. This situation has hindered the Chinese documentary market just opened by the Soviet Union. In 1925, Sun Yat-sen died of illness, and Chiang Kai-shek became the new leader of the Republic of China. His revolutionary concept was completely different from that of the Communist Party. "He was extremely disgusted with the growing strength of the Communist Party in the Kuomintang" (Jing, 2014), and began to destroy the Communist Party. The main reasons are as follows: first, the failure of Chiang Kai-shek's military diplomacy during his visit to the Soviet Union in 1923 made him disappointed with the Soviet Union. Second, political social identity predicts likeminded media selection (Dvir-Gvirsman, 2018).

The ideology and class positions of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party are different. The Kuomintang tends to unite with the bourgeoisie and establish a bourgeois republic of the Three People's Principles; The Communist Party accepted the Marxist-Leninist proletarian ideology spread from the Soviet Union, and the two political parties were essentially in conflict (Jing, 2014). Third, the growing strength of advisers of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union caused great obstacles to Chiang Kai-shek's power concentration. On December 14, 1927,

the Kuomintang government issued the *Order of Severing Diplomatic Relations with Russia*, announcing that it had broken off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, and asked Soviet diplomats stationed in various places to leave the country within a time limit. However, in fact, most Soviet consulates in North China, except Beijing Embassy, continued to exist until the Middle East Road Incident. (The Middle East Road Incident refers to the military conflict between China and the Soviet Union over the ownership of railway rights in the Middle East. The northeast authorities, represented by Xueliang Zhang, launched an armed struggle in July 1929 because they were dissatisfied with the privileges enjoyed by the Soviet Union in the Middle East railway. This conflict lasted for more than five months until December 22nd, and ended with the victory of the Soviet Union and the signing of the Berlin Agreement). On July 18, 1929, the Soviet government announced that it would "sever state relations" with the Kuomintang government (Zhiqing, 1988).

In the spring of 1927, Soviet director Yakov Biorich came to China to film the documentary *Shanghai Chronicle 1927*. From this documentary, we can see the political position of the Soviet Union and the contradiction between Chiang Kai-shek and the Communist Party. This film recorded the life and struggle of the working people in Shanghai in the first stage after the Civil War. "This film shot the heroic posture of the workers' pickets, the demonstrations of the masses and the scenes of British, American and French imperialists increasing their troops in the concession and building fortifications around the concession after the victory of the third workers' armed uprising in Shanghai. The film also showed the crime of killing the Communist Party of China people and revolutionary masses after Chiang Kai-shek rebelled against the revolution." (Weijin, 2013: 56). The subtitles of the film had very clear political positions, such as: "Millions of former slaves have been forever merged with the Soviet State by the Chinese revolution", "General Chiang Kai-shek, the traitor of the Chinese revolution, is making a speech." and so on. The lens used in the film to express class contrast is also very artistic, for example: on the one hand, it showed foreigners gambling, eating, drinking and having fun, on the other hand, it showed Chinese child laborers and female workers working under the supervision of foremen; on the one hand, foreigners took part in sports in order to keep fit, and on the other hand, scrawny Chinese workers had to work more than fifteen hours a day in order to make a living, etc., which were in sharp contrast. *Shanghai Chronicle 1927*, which exposes the oppression and aggression of imperialism against China, is a film with strong ideological and artistic qualities.

In 1932, the Kuomintang resumed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. At that time, Japan launched an aggressive war against China, and Chiang Kai-shek hoped to join hands with the Soviet Union to against Japan. However, because of his distrust of the Soviet Union and his illusions about Sino-Japanese relations, Chiang Kai-shek did not really cooperate with the Soviet Union, and continued to destroy the Communist Party. In 1934, in order to avoid the influence of the film workers of the Communist Party on the Kuomintang, the Kuomintang was reluctant to use private film companies to shoot films, and established an official film organization, whose main purpose was to shoot documentaries with political propaganda intentions.

At this time, Japan had already launched a war of aggression against China, but Chiang Kai-shek always focused on the elimination of the Communist Party and adopted a policy of compromise in the face of Japanese problems. On July 7, 1937, Japan launched a full-scale war of aggression against China, and China began a nationwide war of resistance. The Kuomintang and the Soviet Union resumed friendly relations, and at the same time, they experienced a short period of cooperation with the Communist Party, but they soon split due to different political positions. During the cooperation, a group of members, mainly the Communist Party and Democrats, joined the China Film Studio, the largest film organization of the Kuomintang, to make a documentary about War of Resistance against Japan. The news film department was set up in the Chinese film studio, and Junli Zheng was in charge of it. Since the 1930s, many Chinese filmmakers have translated and introduced articles on Soviet film theory, learning the techniques and theories of famous Soviet filmmakers such as Groupe Dziga Vertov, Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein, Alexander Dovzhenko and so on.

Junli Zheng was also one of them. He translated the first and second chapters of Stanislavski's performance system theory *Actor's Self-cultivation* and published it in *Ta Kung Pao* with the title *An Actor's Notes*. During his work in the news film department, he filmed the sixth episode of the series of documentaries *Anti-Japanese War Special* and other documentaries, and filmed a two-hour documentary *Long Live the Nation*. Junli Zheng has extensively studied the relevant documentaries and theories of the Soviet Union and other Western countries. In his

shooting, he abandoned the rigid recording and reporting methods of general newsreels and documentaries, and on the basis of truly recording real life, he dramatized the actual things (Fei, 2021: 48). However, although a series of documentaries *Anti-Japanese War Special* filmed by Chinese film studios were sent to the Soviet Union for screening through the Sino-Soviet Cultural Association, on the whole, there was little documentary exchange between the Kuomintang and the Soviet Union. In the final analysis, this phenomenon is due to the change of the relationship between the Kuomintang and the Soviet Union. In the early 1940s, due to the Soviet Union's neutral attitude towards Japan and the cessation of its support to China, Sino-Soviet relations began to alienate. The Kuomintang began to establish an alliance with the United States, and set up a wartime news documentary organization following the example of the allies to help distribute and show the films of the allies. At the same time, it also produced and spread its own films on domestic and foreign platforms. "We can find in historical materials that many films shown at that time came from Britain, America and other countries" (Junjian, 2020: 54).

#### *Communist documentary*

Unlike the Kuomintang, the Communist Party of China has always insisted on learning from the Soviet Union, especially in documentary films. "The burden of history determines the collective memory" (Moral et al., 2020). In the article *Documenting Atrocities around the World: Why Engage with the Perpetrators*, Fernando Canet proposes that "cinema is one of the main sources of public narratives that contribute to the construction of the collective memories of a nation" (Canet, 2019). During the war, documentary as a political weapon was almost the consensus of all countries, there are numerous examples of this idea in film history, such as *The Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1934), *Why We Fight* (Frank Capra, 1942–45) or *The Battle of Midway* (John Ford, 1942) (Arnau Roselló, 2021). In 1930s, in order to win propaganda position with the Kuomintang and attract the broad masses of people to support their ideas, the Chinese Left-wing Writers' Union, a literary organization led by the Communist Party, was founded in Shanghai. In August 1930, the Chinese Left-wing Dramatists' Union was also founded in Shanghai. The purpose of Left-wing Dramatists' Union is: to have a certain consciousness and purpose, to engage in the creation and dissemination of art, and to take the initiative to undertake the important task of arousing the people and saving the country. The content of the film part in the *Recent Action Program of the Chinese Left-wing Dramatists' Union* is: "Apart from performing plays, it is necessary for the Chinese film movement to be taken into consideration by the Union at present. In addition to producing screenplays for the production companies and mobilizing the allies to participate in the activities of the production companies, we should also try to raise money to make homemade films" (Zhuqing, Dai, 2008).

The left-wing documentary advocated opposing capitalism, "not just by representing collective action but as a form of activism in and of itself" (Chanan, 2019). In 1932, Yan Xia and Boqi Zheng translated Pudovkin's *Theory of Film Directors and Theory of Film Scripts*. The film theory and works of the Soviet Union were studied and respected by left-wing filmmakers (Haizhou, 2001). In March, 1933, the Communist Party of China set up a film group, and Yan Xia was in charge. Yan Xia said: "At that time, Chinese films, in short, learned from the Soviet Union in theory and the United States in technology" (Danjing, 2007). At that time, the left-wing film workers were deeply influenced by the Soviet Union. They tried to express their inclination with movies like the Soviet Montage School, and used movies to express grievances for the general public. Filmmaking becomes an agentive process for the recognition, deconstruction and reinterpretation of victimhood, once the producers, protagonists and audiences share social location and experience (Kishore, 2021).

As the Communist Party didn't have enough funds to set up a film factory or film documentaries independently at that time, many left-wing filmmakers joined private film companies and used the company's capital to create. "With the deployment of Yan Xia and others, all the work of the left-wing film movement was gradually launched, such as providing screenplays and sending creative cadres to private film companies, developing film and film theory construction, exposing the conspiracy of American businessmen to monopolize Chinese film industry, and spreading Soviet films and their theories" (Wanli, 2005: 44).

In 1935, in order to improve relations with the Soviet Union, the Kuomintang established the Sino-Soviet Cultural Association. Although the association was established by the Kuomintang government, its internal members were mostly Communist Party members and Democrats. In the second year, the association issued the organ publication named *Sino-Soviet Culture*, which was

published continuously for 13 years in a war-torn and difficult environment at that time. "According to Wailu Hou, one of the editors-in-chief, under the leadership and guidance of the Communist Party of China and Chou En-lai, this publication not only reported a large number of revolutionary and construction achievements of the Soviet Union, published Stalin's articles and speeches, but also used a considerable amount of space to publicize Marxist-Leninist theory and published domestic political and cultural articles during the Anti-Japanese War ... among them, the film literature was quite rich, reflecting the situation of Soviet films at that time from different types and angles. Generally speaking, the film literature almost runs through the beginning and end of Sino-Soviet Culture" (Haiyan, 2011). From *Sino-Soviet Culture*, we can see the influence of Soviet films and film theories in China at that time. Boqi Zheng wrote in the article *The Influence of Soviet Films on Chinese Films*: "The good influence received by Chinese films comes entirely from Soviet films. This influence is embodied in the following aspects: first, the theory of Chinese film art comes entirely from the Soviet Union. Secondly, Chinese film artists learned a new creative attitude and a new creative method-new realism from Soviet films. Soviet films have educated Chinese audiences and raised their awareness of film art. Considering the background of the war and the overall situation of cultural exchanges between China and the Soviet Union, this analysis basically accords with the actual situation of cultural exchanges between the two countries" (Haiyan, 2011: 23).

The Communist Party of China studied the theory of Soviet documentary, not only because of the historical ties between the Communist Party of China and the Soviet Union, but more importantly, the two countries had the same idea of representing the proletariat against fascism at that time. Therefore, they supported each other in documentary communication. On January 21, 1937, the Soviet documentary *Ethiopia* was released in Shanghai. This documentary recorded the Ethiopian people's struggle against Italian invaders, and it was warmly welcomed by Chinese audiences. However, influenced by the Italian consulate, the Kuomintang decided to ban the film the next day. Later, the film was re-released after some scenes were cut, but the cinema showing this film was destroyed by Italian sailors. In this regard, Yan Xia and others led 121 literary and art workers jointly issue a declaration and protest this situation. In 1938, the Communist Party of China founded Yan'an Film Group. When filming the first documentary *Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army*, because the environment of the Communist Party at that time was too difficult to develop films, the staff finally tried to bring the films to the Soviet Union for post-production with its help. Almost all documentaries shown by the screening team of Yan'an Film Group came from the Soviet Union. Yinxian Wu wrote about the scene in the book *News Films: The Years we experienced*, when the Yan'an projection team was playing newsreel, "Soon after we returned to Yan'an from behind enemy lines, the projection team of the film group was also set up, and two cameras and a generator were sent by the Soviet Union, and the films were also sent by the Soviet Union, including *Lenin in October*, *Lenin in 1918*, *Chapaev* and so on. Because these films were shown too many times, there were no contiguous holes, so the screening of one night was interrupted many times. Moreover, the audience had to walk more than ten miles to see the movie, but they still enjoyed it" (Siji, 2002: 22).

In 1945, War of Resistance against Japan ended, and the Kuomintang and the Communist Party began the second civil war. On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded; the Communist Party won and the Kuomintang gradually withdrew from the historical stage. In the following seventeen years, Chinese documentaries entered the period of "visualized political theory". During this period, China almost completely learned from the Soviet Union in documentary. Because the Soviet Union won the anti-fascist war, and the Soviet Union's socialist experience of more than 30 years is worth learning for China, it was inevitable for China to emulate the Soviet Union at that time. The documentary of the Soviet Union had a good reputation and status in the world, and its ideological and artistic quality was very high. In addition, the directors of the Soviet Union came to China to made documentaries in the early days and won the appreciation of China, so at that time, China had a strong dependence on learning from the Soviet Union in documentary creation. On the day of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the documentary about founding ceremony was completed under the guidance of the Soviet film crew. "After the Second World War, China and the Soviet Union had many contacts. China has followed the Soviet model in many aspects, and the Soviet Union has also provided China with a lot of support and assistance. In the second half of 1949 ... Beijing was holding the National Political Consultative Conference and preparing for founding ceremony. At this time, the Soviet Union sent

two high-level film crews to cooperate with our Beijing Film Studio to shoot two large-scale documentaries, *Liberation of China* and *the Victory of the Chinese People*" (Siji, 2002: 27).

These two documentaries were still post-produced in Moscow. At the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China, two of China's four major state-owned film studios almost exclusively produced documentaries. In July, 1953, the government set up a special central news documentary film studio and hired Soviet experts to train documentary film workers. During this period, China's documentary industry flourished, the number of documentaries increased rapidly, and the themes and styles showed diversified development, but in general, its characteristics were as follows: brothers of newspapers. Chinese leaders took Lenin's attitude towards documentaries as the guiding ideology for documentary creation, and believed that documentaries should report real-life events and phenomena to the people as quickly as newspapers, just like the Soviet newsreel *Kino-Pravda* in the 1920s. At the Second International Congress of the Communist Party in 1920, Lenin officially introduced the new eastern orientation of the Soviet state, the so-called "Soviet Eastern Policy" (Fouskas, Gökay, 2020).

Lenin went so far as to suggest that, with "the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries", it might be possible for Asia to skip the capitalist stage and "go over to the Soviet system, and, through certain stages of development, to communism" (Lenin, 1967). As early as 1922, Lenin said when talking about movies that "reflect the reality of the Soviet Union": "To produce newsreels that widely report news, this newsreel should have an appropriate image, that is to say, it should be a visual political commentary ...Newsreels are not only news reports, but also a record-based objective reflection of events, but a strong political visual political commentary. Journalists should learn political theory from the excellent examples of our party and Soviet newspapers and become Bolshevik journalists with cameras" (Wanli, 2005: 143). Because the word "documentary" didn't appear at that time, the newsreel Lenin said refers to a short documentary.

In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, China simply and blindly copied Lenin's thoughts, comprehensively imitated the documentary mode of the Soviet Union, and made documentary creation in accordance with the spirit of Soviet newspapers, shooting more than 2,000 documentaries. It was a period in which more documentaries were made in Chinese film history.

#### 4. Results

The influence on the early Chinese documentaries of the Soviet Union was very profound, which was determined by the relationship between the two countries. In the history of Sino-Soviet contacts, the focus of contacts between the Soviet Union and China has shifted many times. This paper draws a result from two aspects and three stages.

Two aspects: In the 1920s, China established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Since then, the Soviet Union has established cooperative relations with the Kuomintang and developed the Communist Party within the Kuomintang. Throughout the history of Sino-Soviet exchanges, although the Soviet Union had different degrees of diplomatic relations with the Kuomintang government, the Communist government and local governments in different periods, documentary it focused on two aspects: the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. In the early period of the Republic of China, the documentary films of the Soviet Union had made high achievements in the world, and a number of outstanding filmmakers and film theorists appeared, which were much ahead of the documentary films of China in both technology and theory. As the government realized the superiority of documentary as political tool, documentary inevitably became the focus of attention, and both the Kuomintang government and the Communist government hoped to master documentary films as an important tool for publicity and education. The Soviet Union's influence on Chinese documentaries was not only in terms of technology and theory, but also in terms of ideology. The Soviet Union took the Marxist-Leninist line, representing the proletariat, while the Kuomintang took the capitalist line, representing the bourgeoisie. Their different political positions led to the diplomatic failure of both sides (of course, this is not the only reason). It can be seen from the above that the Kuomintang tended to learn from western documentaries. On the contrary, the Communist Party of China was completely consistent with the Soviet Union in ideology. Before the 1940s, the Communist Party of China was unable to make a film because of its harsh environment and lack of funds. Since then, China has almost completely imitated the Soviet documentary model, taking documentaries as "visualized party newspapers" (Wanli, 2005: 145).

*Three stages:*

1924–1927: This period was the initial stage of the development of Chinese documentary films. Prior to this, almost all countries that came to China to film documentaries were western countries, and the Soviet Union's documentary filming in China broke the monopoly of western countries on the Chinese documentary market. First of all, Sun Yat-sen agreed with the Soviet documentary model. He believed that documentary was an important medium for people to accept an ideology. In this respect, the Soviet Union had made a good demonstration and it was worth learning. During this period, Lai Man-wai, a photographer of a private film company, became Sun Yat-sen's exclusive photographer, filming a large number of documentaries about him. "He was the first person to put forward the slogan of saving the country through movies, believing that movies can not only entertain people, but also change customs, assist education and improve society." At the same time, Soviet directors also came to China to film documentaries. It can be seen that China was very willing to learn from the Soviet Union during this period (Fei, 2021: 34).

1932-1949: This was a period of rapid development of Chinese documentary films, and the situation in this period was rather chaotic. The main reason was the complicated diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union, the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. From 1927 to 1932, as Chiang Kai-shek broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, "at that time, Chinese filmmakers had long been interested in Soviet films, but due to the prohibition of the Kuomintang government, they actually had little contact" (Haizhou, 2001). "With the resumption of diplomatic relations between China and the Soviet Union in 1932 and the easing of relations between the two countries, the Kuomintang government also moderately relaxed the restrictions on access to Soviet films" (Qianwen, 2021). However, due to the opposition between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, the Kuomintang government prefers western documentaries. During this period, the Communist Party of China gradually grew and developed, and a film troupe was set up to shoot documentaries. The Communist Party of China had a very close relationship with the Soviet Union. It can be seen from historical materials and documents that most of the documentaries shown and the film theories studied by the Communist Party at that time came from the Soviet Union, and even when they encountered difficulties in making documentaries, they were sent to the Soviet Union for help.

1949-1966: This was the period when China learned from the Soviet Union in an all-round way. At this time, Chinese documentary organizations were completely concentrated in the hands of the new people's regime, and the documentary industry flourished. In this period, the core of documentary was to publicize the line and principles of the Communist Party and the government, and strive for the realization of the communist ideal. This idea of creation was the inevitable result of learning from the Soviet Union.

## 5. Conclusion

Documentary is the carrier of history and the witness of the times. Looking back on the history of Chinese early documentaries and analyzing the factors that influence the development of documentaries, we can learn from the successful principles. In the history of documentary development in China, the influence of the Soviet Union is undoubtedly enormous and successful on the whole. In addition to the excellent techniques, artistry and ideology of Soviet documentaries, more importantly, Soviet films generally emphasized realism and anti-war propaganda, which was consistent with the environment China was in at that time. Both of China and Soviet Union had the same political ideology and represented the proletariat. In addition, the close relationship between the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of China was also a very important factor, so Soviet documentaries were very popular in China. Numerous filmmakers learned from Soviet filmmakers and documentaries. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, due to the political and diplomatic relations between the two countries and China's worship of the Soviet Union, China has one-sided learning from Soviet documentaries, which also has certain limitations. A correct understanding of the history of China's documentary development is of positive significance to the future documentary creation and innovation.

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