Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Contexts, edited by Wang Lingzhen, is a rare collection of essays addressing the works of Chinese female filmmakers with the purpose of reexamining frameworks of transnational feminism in the Chinese context. This anthology not only draws attention to a neglected area of research on Chinese film studies but also reassesses the racial, heterosexual and cultural hegemony of classical feminist film theory. It does so by employing transnational feminist practice where the globalisation process is believed to be inherently gendered, racialised and sexualised. The historical and geopolitical contingency of Chinese women's cinema across “Cultural China” (mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora) sheds light on an alternative vision of female subjectivities in the Chinese context. This book is a rare gem that gathers discussions on Chinese women filmmaking with countless examples of female Chinese directors and is a great source of enrichment to the scholarship on the major disciplines of film, women's and Chinese studies.

The edited volume is divided into five parts, the first of which explores how authorship of Chinese female directors provides unique counter-voices that challenge the ideologies of pre-existing political and cultural contexts. Despite the parameters set by the social and collective function of socialist film authorship in promoting mainstream ideologies, Dong Kena's Small Grass (1962) is explored in Chapter One by Wang Lingzhen as a contingent, subjective and unique expression of gendered experience. In Chapter Two, Yau Ching investigates Tang Shu Shuen as an early Chinese female director whose own gender and cultural identities are reflected in her filmic representations of gender marginalisation and nationalistic tradition, challenging 1960s and 1970s colonial Hong Kong's “phallocratic” tendency to dismiss female authorship. This part concludes with Chapter Three where Zhen Zhang focuses on Sylvia Chang as a transnational filmmaker who has fashioned numerous films with subject matter and styles relating to the melodrama tradition within transnational contexts.

The second part of the book focuses on films with the subject matter of women and how these women stories develop alongside political contexts. This is done either by being bound by ideological parameters or, as presented by E. Ann Kaplan in Chapter Six, by circumventing these parameters via individual normative narrative motifs that appeal to a “fixing” of emotions or with the technique “affect” that extends the critique on patriarchy to a more generalised resistance to dominant values (Kaplan, p. 168). Chapter Four by Xingyang Li also presents how the stories of women develop alongside Chinese political and social contexts as Li describes how the female
films and stories of Huang Shuqin manage through dominant discourses of Chinese society between the early 1980s and early 1990s. The films of three female Taiwanese filmmakers Sylvia Chang, Huang Yu-shan and Zero Chan also present examples of female subjectivities negotiated alongside Taiwanese history in Chapter Five by Yu-Shan Huang and Chun-Chi Wang.

The third part continues with the woman as the visual subject in film as well as feminist cinema in the Chinese context. “Cinefeminism” in fifth-generation women filmmakers is covered in Chapter Seven by S. Louisa Wei as a “double-layered countercinema” since it not only counters traditional Chinese cinema but also that of mainstream fifth-generation films (Wei, p. 175). Gina Marchetti investigates Ning Ying's Perpetual Motion (2005) in portraying the challenges middle-aged or older Chinese female cultural elites face as they move from the years of the Cultural Revolution into an increasingly cosmopolitan and neoliberal China in Chapter Eight. Shuqin Cui examines the trilogy of Li Yu in Chapter Nine for its presentation of homosexuality against a heterosexual environment, the use of the female body as site for sociocultural punishment and the location of female sexuality in a commercial society where the female body is commodified.

In its fourth part, the book dedicates itself to the role of female scriptwriters in Chinese women's cinema. It begins with Chapter Ten where actress-writers Yang Naimei and Ai Xia of 1920s and 1930s Shanghai are looked at by Yiman Wang to describe the ways in which the image of the “new woman” had gone from being desirable to rejected. The neglected screenplays of Eileen Chang are noted by Yingjin Zhang in Chapter Eleven with an emphasis on the expansion of her artistic repertoire from print to screen and by exploring the “equivocal” contrasts between male and female perspectives in Chang's romantic comedies. Christopher Lupke looks at the literary voice and influence of Taiwanese author and scriptwriter, Chu T'ien-wen, in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's earlier works in Chapter Twelve. Jingyuan Zhang, in Chapter Thirteen, explores signs of auteurship in the works of Xu Jinglei, a contemporary independent art film director who is responsible for the screenplays of her own films and also plays lead roles in them.

This edited volume ends with a part that presents female filmmakers of the Chinese diaspora. It begins with a biographical dedication by Kar Law in Chapter Fourteen to Chinese-American director, Esther Eng, who, in the mid-1930s, was largely involved in cross-border filmmaking with a focus on feminist ideals and diasporic Chinese communities in the United States. Staci Ford introduces the films of Mabel Cheung where women simultaneously uphold traditional values and embrace change without pitting against men, a Hong Kong-style feminism that is similar to Third Wave feminism in the United States in Chapter Fifteen. Shiao-Ying Shen deals with the Chinese-Australian psychic and emotional processes of migration in Clara Law's films in the last chapter of the final part of the anthology.
With a compelling introduction in this edited volume by Wang Lingzhen that details the relevance of examining transnational feminism as an alternative to existing Western feminist theories, the reason for exploring Chinese feminism in Chinese women's cinema remains a strong one. However, many of the chapters in this book are preoccupied with the socio-political and historical developments of the country in question when describing the female subjectivities that accompany the films. This results in a focus on the nation-state instead of the transnational as an organising principle which the book aspires to establish. It disappoints in providing possibilities of an interconnectedness between the feminisms that are voiced in the women's cinemas of Greater China and the Chinese diaspora, i.e. influences amongst the Chinese women filmmakers themselves and the women's cinemas of these political entities are not dealt with in the book but may be interesting to look at for the case of a transnational Chinese feminism.

Despite its lack in drawing connections between Chinese women's cinemas across mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora, the anthology provides an intriguing case to counter classical feminist film theory by focusing on the role of female authorship and agency in projecting female subjectivities within or beyond the constraints of existing political and cultural sensitivities. As a study on “non-Western” women and feminist practices in academic disciplines beyond the constraints of area studies, this edited volume accomplishes in opening Chinese women's cinema to interdisciplinary contexts. More importantly, this anthology successfully puts the spotlight on the rarely researched topic of Chinese women filmmaking. It is an invaluable source where both well- and less-known Chinese female directors, scriptwriters and their works, deserving of further study for making waves on the cinematic arena, are gathered in one. It is highly recommended for scholars of Chinese cinema, film, women, and Chinese studies.

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