

***THE 400 MILLION* (1938) and the Solidarity Film: ‘halfway between
Hollywood and Newsreel’**

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Abstract

The Dutch documentarist Joris Ivens’ anti-fascist cinema of the late 1930s coincided with his invention of the solidarity documentary. His Chinese film *The 400 Million* (1938) is analyzed as a prototype of the subgenre in respect to its development, production and reception. The film is seen in the light of problems inherent in the classical-sound documentary aesthetics as it embraced anti-fascist politics, and in particular intercultural issues related to frontline filmmaking in a China united by a precarious Guomindang-Communist coalition.

Keywords

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China

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Sino-Japanese war

The following discussion of Joris Ivens’ first film on China – the first of many in four episodes spread over half a century – is developed from my forthcoming larger book-length study of his oeuvre. *The 400 Million* was the second of his anti-fascist solidarity films of the period of the Popular Front, the decade when he was based in the USA leading up to and including World War II. This film on the Chinese resistance to Japanese aggression followed his

most successful film, *The Spanish Earth* (1937), and preceded his other anti-fascist solidarity film, the lesser-known compilation film on the Soviet Union *Our Russian Front* (1941).

These brief comments on the development, production and reception of the 1938 project in China focus on three aspects of Ivens' work: the consolidation of the vocabulary of the classical sound documentary; related problems that are inherent in the solidarity genre; and specific intercultural issues related to his five-decade adventure with documentary film-making in China. In particular I will focus on the topic of documentary *mise-en-scène* and its specific pertinence to all three aspects.

Over the last generation, there has been a consensus within the discipline of film studies about the ideological pitfalls of Euro-American cinematic depictions of the postcolonial 'other' (Rony 1996). This includes the specific perils, both ethical and aesthetic, posed to roving artists filming in 'exotic' locations, even paradoxically those most well-intentioned projects that are produced 'in solidarity' with postcolonial peoples. These liabilities of the foreign film-maker's gaze, ranging from 'unthinking Eurocentrism' to paternalism, exploitation and cultural damage, are of course sometimes balanced by a potential for a Bakhtinian cultural interaction, mutually enriching, and an opening of a space for transnational knowledge (Richards 2006: 55–64). The solidarity genre exemplified by Ivens' Chinese work (his final 1988 project *Tale of the Wind* is less typical of the genre than his earlier three initiatives of the 1930s, the 1950s and the 1970s, all more explicitly political) calls for a nuanced reflection on this potential paradox and balance.

From early conceptions to final structure

Ivens' conception of the *400 Million* project evolved continuously during the tortuous trajectory between concept and finished film, and a few glimpses of the various stages of the

evolution are relevant to these comments at the outset.

Before arriving in China in 1938, Ivens hoped that the Chinese situation would permit the kind of heightened *personalization* of the documentary form that he had attempted on the Spanish front but which had eluded him. What he called ‘the logical development of the documentary’ would permit political film-makers to go deeper than the superficial and racist clichés of the western newsreel companies or the travelogue (Ivens 1969: 211). But the initial outline, a story about an exemplary young man and woman symbolizing China’s ‘new spirit of construction,’ developed by Ivens together with his American leftist collaborators, would prove impracticable in the field (Ivens 1938a). There are also reports at the same time of Ivens’ plans ‘to make a film about the life of a child-soldier, a ‘little red devil,’ in one of the mobile units of the Eighth Route Army (Isherwood and Auden 1939: 54).¹ It is likely that the film-maker, even at this early date, had an official film conception for the Guomindang officials who welcomed him to the then capital of Hankou and would ‘guide’ him around China, and a slightly different private one, still involving some ‘personal angle’ along with a Left solidarity discourse, which he would share with his intimates and attempt to bring to fruition. But the Guomindang officers’ interference was not to be underestimated.

To compensate partly for these difficulties at the front, Ivens evolved a ‘triptych structure’ idea for the film: the first part would be ‘political and economic background of this historic period’; the second a focus on the war and on the victorious battle of Tai’erzhuang on 6

¹ The English writers were completing a book assignment on the war, and crossed paths with Ivens at several points. Isherwood’s account of their April meeting in Xian (p.165) relates that Ivens’ photographer collaborator, Robert Capa, was finding Chinese faces unsatisfactory for the camera in comparison to Spanish faces: that at this point the film-makers were still counting on going to Yanan, and that they asked the Englishmen to take photos back to the US with them to skirt the censors.

April 1938 (near Xuzhou); and the third section, a personal narrative of ‘a young Chinese defending his country’ (Ivens 1969: 170).

This idea is visible in the final film except that the final two panels are combined; the third panel of *400* is devoted to the battle of Tai’erzhuang and at the same time focused around an apparently fictional exemplary narrator-protagonist, Sergeant Wang. The other two panels have also been reshaped: the first one deals with the historical China (historical background and the Japanese aggression), and the second one deals with ‘modern’ China (united resistance and national construction). However, it is clear from the somewhat peripheral and contrived role of Sergeant Wang as internal narrator (functioning primarily as a narrative device without achieving any real definition as a character) that the circumstances continued to mediate drastically between Ivens’ increasingly realistic conceptions and the rushes he was continuing to shoot daily.

Another essential element in the original conception of the film was to add to the tantalizing views of Mao Zedong’s Eighth Route Army and the new Soviet zones of Shanxi that had already been circulating in the West. A number of the fictional characters considered in the early stages of the project were to encounter or to be part of this milieu. He was specifically interested in the guerillas operating in the northwest, and in their relations with ‘the people’. On May 15, while in the remote Lanzhou area, in a desperate attempt to be permitted to move beyond Xian to the northwest district, Ivens drew up and presented, to the Guomindang’s Colonel Huang, an outline for a strongly narrative episode to be shot there. This episode featured a nurse-soldier romance and even a visit from Mme Jiang – all necessarily not too complicated and ‘very visual’ for Euro-American audiences (Ivens 1938b).

However, there is also evidence that Ivens no longer believed that such an admittedly melodramatic emphasis was feasible or desirable. This treatment may simply have been an attempt to mollify his guides, who were exerting a ‘terrific pressure... to get a full script of our film’ (Ivens 1969: 174). Notes written three days previously to this, in Dutch significantly, are in obvious despair at the constant surveillance, and possibly at the news that they were being taken towards Mongolia. They suggest splitting up the group and recommend the shooting of more straight documentary material because of the impossibility of the original story and the futility of looking for an actor in Xian while under surveillance. The notes go on to hope that later on there might be contact with the guerillas, since a story without them would have no sense, and to express, reassuringly, just a glimmer of ‘mad inspiration’ in the landscape (Ivens 1969: 173).

Yet another detailed formulation of a film outline for work in the Communist areas, dated 15 May, possibly written as notes for his cinematographer in the event that they would be able to circumvent their ‘guides’ by splitting up into two groups, has retained only a vestige of the narrative, personalized orientation. It documents Ivens’ emphases and strategies in the shooting of the hybrid style of this period, as well as the ideological, formal and topical accents he was hoping for at this time. This would include much emphasis on the Eight Route Army, including Mao playing basketball with students and soldiers, but balanced by emphasis on national unity under Generalissimo Jiang: actual guerilla combat and supporting activities of civilians; some exemplary portraits of ‘young heroes and brave girls’ but not too individualistic in focus; and throughout points of access for foreign audiences, such as American churches (Ivens 1938c). The de-emphasis on re-enactment in this proposal has clearly been influenced by a reaction against the Guomindang censors, who themselves had their own conception of *mise-en-scène* as we shall see. The pressures of film-making in a volatile and unfamiliar political arena, as well as of

political interference, were clearly instigating this vacillation between a 'spontaneous' ancestor of *cinéma-vérité* or direct cinema, and the *mise-en-scène* personalization that Ivens felt appropriate to his goals.

In a letter drafted to a New York collaborator after the completion of *The 400 Million*, Ivens would complain bitterly that he had been prevented from making a film with a 'story' in China and had to turn to a 'straight documentary film' (Ivens 1938-39). His unrealized goal, he said, had been to prove to himself and to others where the new documentary film was to go, but instead he had been forced to give up his 'original conception and styles'. Most angry about the censors and spies, he listed scenes that he had been prevented from filming, including images of a blind mother. He closed by affirming his conviction that the narrative idea, though still theoretical, is 'ten times right' (Ivens 1938–1939). Looking back a few years later, Ivens was less bitter about the failure of the project of personalization in China. He still hoped that 'after seeing the film you could think you know one or two Chinese; you could like them or dislike them...' (Ivens 1969: 212). Ivens was presumably referring not only to the composite soldier Sergeant Wang, but also to the portraits of the Guomindang leaders (clearly in the 'dislike' category), to the fleeting encounters with Madame Sun Yat-sen (Soong Ching-ling), to the Communist historian and writer, Guo Moruo (who speaks at a public ceremony in one sequence), and to a few other minor dignitaries, some anonymous. Perhaps more memorable for Ivens was a couple depicted searching for their belongings in the ruins of their house near Tai'erzhuang, distant from a camera that is understandably discreet, but decidedly discernible as 'characters'. Towards the end of the post-production, Ivens made an attempt to step up the personal quality of this short scene by adding to the commentary the names of the couple, Li Bo, and of the village, plus the judicious revelation (not provided by the image) that the husband had first searched for his

hammer but that the wife had tried to uncover her grinding-stones. The random concreteness of this revelation adds greatly to the personal effect of this scene. One reviewer declared that the personal vignettes were the highlight of the film and that they should have been extended (Nugent 1939), a prescription with which Ivens would have been in complete agreement. It would only be another film on China thirty-five years later, *How Yukong Moved the Mountains*, that would permit the detailed portraits Ivens was seeking.

The final structure of the ‘straight’ documentary that Ivens made ‘against his will’, when all was said and done, was not dissimilar in very general terms to that of the hybrid *Spanish Earth* (Ivens 1938-39). The same propaganda structure of idyll-threat-resistance is still present, though in modulated form. An initial exposition of the Chinese historical, geographical and cultural context, extolling Chinese contributions to human society, leads into the presentation of the history of Japanese-aggression and the current attack. Next, a long series of sequences detailing the unification of the country and its modernization under the Guomindang’s ‘New Life’ programme follows, and finally the climactic battle of Tai’erzhuang, which shows the people triumphing over the aggressor. As in *Spanish Earth*, there are two vivid atrocity sequences showing synthetically edited civilian bombardment. One is located at the beginning of the film, as a kind of prologue, apparently a late addition to the film to enliven the original beginning: a lyrical exploration of Chinese landscape and culture. The second bombing sequence, placed near the end, purports to show Japanese revenge for the Tai’erzhuang defeat; this comes between the victory and an exultant torchlight celebration that concludes the film. This latter placement was apparently intended to qualify the euphoria inherent in the victory and in the overall structure of the last movement of the film, and to forcefully remind viewers of the challenges ahead.

Between ‘Spontaneous’ and *Mise-en-scène*.

Although *The 400 Million* continues the same basic hybrid of spontaneous and dramatic cinematographic modes that characterized *Spanish Earth* (Waugh 1984), significant inflections arose from the shooting situation. *The Camera and I* suggests reasons for a significant reduction in ‘spontaneous’ cinematography, usually carried out with smaller ‘hand cameras’. One anecdote describes a spontaneous demonstration that the group came across by accident in Xian, a kind of musical street-theatre organized by four students:

...the whole marketplace was alive. The elementary latent force in these people – found all over China – was being brought to life by these students. It was a great manifestation. But we were not allowed to film it because it would give the impression that the Chinese mass was dirty and not well organized! We argued with the censor. No luck. The arguments became stronger. The censor put his hand in front of the lens. A very conclusive argument. ...the next morning about seven o'clock our Chinese company had arranged something terrific for us. On the great square, without anything typically Chinese, they had lined up about 10,000 people. All nicely arranged. Children with children, men with men, bicycles with bicycles. Four shiny loudspeakers and forty students instead of yesterday's four were facing the crowd. ‘Here's your chance,’ they said.
(Ivens 1969: 176)

This anecdote suggests several reasons for the suppression of the ‘spontaneous’ mode in *The 400 Million* at the instance of the censors. The Chinese insistence on the propaganda value of images of organization and modernization is not incomprehensible. In fact, it seems even very contemporary in its instinctive understanding of the complicity of the code of the ‘exotic’ in China’s historic colonial humiliation: a code that Ivens’ innocent phrase ‘typically Chinese’ hints may be more residually present in the project than his disavowals of ‘tourist’ attitudes elsewhere would suggest (Ivens 1969: 172).² It is clear at the same time

² On p.176, Ivens remembers avoiding ‘picturesque’ images that his audience would have already encountered in ‘travelogues,’ ‘so I concentrated more on the less-exotic things’.

that the class identification of the Guomindang hosts was threatened by the film-maker's interest in the proletariat and the peasantry (natural subjects for the 'spontaneous' mode in their, presumably widespread, media innocence). Though his threat was not necessarily related to the Chinese elite's conscious fear of the film-maker's communist sympathies.

The existence of purely cultural factors in the Guomindang's repudiation of the 'spontaneous' mode cannot be discounted, nor is it easy to confirm. Ivens was not the first or the last of western film-makers to encounter in China what was, to Western thinking, an incomprehensible aesthetic of photography, or to imply that purely cultural variants were responsible (Leyda 1972: 8). Susan Sontag discusses the example of Michelangelo Antonioni's 1972 documentary production in China *Chung Kuo*, revealing the enormous complexity of a subject that is beyond the scope of this study (Sontag 1978: 167–180). The fact that Antonioni encountered attitudes from the heirs of Mao during the Cultural Revolution that are similar to those thirty years earlier of the minions of Jiang – prohibitions to film this or that 'dirty', 'unorganized' scene, etc. – would suggest that cultural factors are indeed the determining factor. The fact that Ivens' exercise with his Beijing students, *600,000,000 with You* (1958), virtually reproduces the Guomindang *mise-en-scène* style of 1938, while his *Comment Yukong déplaça les montagnes* (1972–1976) successfully introduced the diametrically opposed aesthetic of *vérité* or direct cinema to China, warns that the subject is perilously complex.

Ivens provides an additional anecdote that illuminates the problem from yet another perspective:

About a hundred badly wounded soldiers arrived at the station...
We decide to film this in detail. I asked Jack [the project's business assistant] to try and have the bearers not look too obviously at the camera. He doesn't respond in his usual manner and I can see that the directions he gives are vague. I worry because the picture

will not give the audience the feeling of naturalness so I ask him to be more to the point with the bearers. He refuses and runs away. John and I continue the picture as best we can. And I use the only Chinese words I know: Bii Yao-Kan – Don't look at the camera. Works all right, but it is a little mechanical. Later, on the way home, I find Jack and have a long talk with him.

In a way he is right. He says 'I couldn't yell at my own people. They have fought so hard and they are so badly wounded. I have too much respect for them, and therefore I am silent. Directing them to look or not to look would be cruel. I would like to help them in some way.'

There it is! But our way of helping is to make a good film. To move people by *its professional quality* so they will feel and understand that the wounded soldier needs a good stretcher for his very life. John, Capa and I have the same respect as Jack for the wounded Chinese; but we cannot allow it to influence us when we are doing our work. (Ivens 1969: 168, my emphasis)

The cultural dynamic is displaced in Ivens' analysis by the ethical, the political and the aesthetic, but it is still present. Ivens is asking his subjects to pose but in a different way from the posing preferred by the Guomindang in the street-theatre incident. It would appear that the codes of the 'spontaneous' mode are called into question in the incident with Jack; 'professional quality' and 'the feeling of naturalness', are not 'natural' in the least but culturally determined and as dependent on artificial conventions of representation as the variation of the 'newsreel' mode preferred by the Guomindang and not a few occidental film-makers and governments. Rather than being 'the first stage of camera culture,' as Susan Sontag might infer (Sontag 1978: 171), the Chinese elite's visual culture may instead, ironically, simply be a variation of Ivens' own camera culture based on related styles of 'posing' and conceptions of 'the feeling of naturalness'. After all, in the sequence that deals with Guomindang government, military, and ladies' council meetings, a perfect familiarity with Ivens' code of naturalness is displayed.

This curious tangle of cultural politics should not obscure the essential fact that the perceived 'immediacy' and 'intimacy' of much of *Spanish Earth's* 'spontaneous' material is, by

and large, missing from *The 400 Million*. The Li Bo example also stands out as an exception for its ‘spontaneous’ resonance: an example of an event too poignant even for the intervention of *metteur-en-scène* and censor, and as I have stated, even for the approach of the camera:

We accomplished a lot of fine work in Taièrzhuang today. Three hundred and fifty refugees have returned to the places where their houses once stood. Out of three thousand that once lived there, we filmed the first to come back, a man and his wife. They paid no attention to the camera; they paid no attention to anyone except themselves. (Ivens 1969:176)

It is no accident that virtually all of the ‘spontaneous’ moments in *The 400 Million* have some such calamity as their pretext. Though the shooting ratio of seven-to-one might suggest a higher proportion of ‘spontaneous’ material, this is not the case. At the front on 13 April, Ivens estimated that, up to that point, about 30 per cent of the shooting had been with the hand-cameras – a figure that can be taken roughly as the proportion of ‘spontaneous’ shooting up to that point (Ivens 1969: 168). This figure is even higher than the proportion for ‘spontaneous’ material included in the final film, reflecting front conditions that encouraged more ‘spontaneous’ cinematography than normal. With the reduction of the *proto-vérité* spontaneous mode, the *mise-en-scène* mode grows to dominate the text of *The 400 Million*. This increase of *mise-en-scène* in the film was not the main subject of Ivens’ bitter complaints, rather the fact that the film-makers themselves were not often enough the *metteurs-en-scène*. Ivens’ conception of his hybrid style from this period puts the emphasis on balance –neither ‘naturalism’ nor ‘re-enactment’ should dominate. That he had intended to increase the proportion of the latter in the Chinese film is clear from the various early treatments that have already been discussed, and from the expanded crew. However, instead of the customary interaction of film-makers with subjects that he was counting on, the sponsors and censors attempted to impose their own conception of *mise-en-scène* interaction onto the situation. For example, Ivens approached the filming of the pilgrimage site

of the famous Jiang kidnapping by stationing two children looking up at the inscriptions on the site. Their censor replaced the children with three ‘stiff’ soldiers, who the film-makers refused to shoot – rejecting a change of content rather than a change of principle (Ivens 1969: 176). Elsewhere Ivens used an identical tactic of animating an object by having subjects look at it within the frame, usually a poster or a map. On other occasions Ivens used *mise-en-scène* involving children as a means of ensuring a flavour of naturalism, for example a shot of a group of children running quickly towards the camera, a frequent device in Ivens’ work. Shots such as this, where Ivens had a relative amount of control over the *mise-en-scène*, stand clearly apart from those affected by the Guomindang meddling.

The Ivens *mise-en-scène* material stands out either because of a clearly visible interaction based on the shared and consensual understanding of the process, as in the brief encounter with Soong Ching-ling – basically several static but luminous close ups of this elegant seated figure – or because the customary Ivens visual style or iconography is recognizable. Some of the most elegant sequences of the film belong in this latter category: a view of a field-telephone operator on duty at the base of a blossoming fruit tree introduced by a slow pan down from the mass of flowers, a shot that dazzled reviewers; or a precisely articulated sequence of recruits doing Taiji (Tai-chi) warm-up exercises in a sunny courtyard, established by a symmetrically composed long-shot pan and then detailed at medium range; some shots exploring the country’s mobile inland cottage industries, in which shoemaking is studied as carefully as any job in the past with the usual concise pans from the object to the worker’s face and vice versa; or, finally, a whole narrative sequence depicting a group of peasants in a rice field being summoned to battle and picking up their hidden weapons to fall into formation. This latter sequence, also held up for praise in the reviews, is a unit of twelve shots, clearly *mise-en-scène*, including the customary

scrupulous continuity and intricate pan re-framings.

In contrast, the three formal Guomindang meeting sequences appear stiff and inauthentic. Though Ivens half-heartedly claimed that such scenes had never before been filmed, reviewers were unimpressed: one critic found the Guomindang ‘neither cinematic nor illuminating’ (Nugent 1939). Ivens and Van Dongen solved the problem of the stiffness of the Guomindang-orchestrated Xian demonstration in the editing. The footage was close in visual style to the static idiom of commercial newsreels with the processions and chorus lines that Ivens had noted at the rough-cut stage carried the ‘danger of repetition’ (Ivens 1939). Their solution was to intercut it with the silent encounter with Soong Ching-ling (an elision of about one thousand geographical miles and an even greater political distance since this Communist ally was in virtual political exile in Hong Kong). The placement of these sustained elegant shots of Soong, with their graphic contrast to the poster likenesses of her late husband and the Generalissimo stiffly held aloft in the staged demonstration, was clearly a vengeful but veiled taunt at Soong’s arch-rival sister Madame Jiang (Soong May-ling), but it also involved a compromise. The final voiceover text elides Soong’s political affiliation: this future president of the People’s Republic of China is described simply and vaguely as a brave woman typifying the spirit of the nation.

With regard to the actual combat material, Ivens used *mise-en-scène* as well, partly because he was almost always relatively far from the heat of battle, unlike in Spain. At one point, his diary describes a fairly productive day of shooting on the front in the vocabulary of the studio: ‘Today we took five hundred and eighty-five feet of film, about eighteen setups. Practically no retakes. You can't do many retakes at the front’ (Ivens 1969: 160). The following day, ‘the battery fired twelve shots especially for us’ and the crew learned the key phrase,

already mentioned, ‘Don't look at the camera’ (Ivens 1969: 161). On the day after the battle (8 April), the entry notes with relief that the film-makers can use their large camera again (the normal equipment for *mise-en-scène*) because the danger is past (Ivens 1969: 164), and, on another date, in recording the shooting of the day, Ivens remembers the exact number of shots taken – fifteen – a detail for which ‘spontaneous’ shooting would hardly be conducive (Ivens 1969: 161).

In short, *mise-en-scène* had become the dominant mode in Ivens’ hybrid form of documentary. Though he assured one interviewer that the film included ‘no staging’ (Barnes 1939), it is clear that he meant outright fabrication of events through scripting and actors, rather than the border regions between fiction and non-interventionist ‘spontaneous’ shooting that comprised the bulk of his work on this project. As he himself described this mode in a pencil note during the filming, it is ‘halfway between Hollywood and newsreel’ (Ivens 1939).

The 400 Million: Ideological Aspects

The solidarity film by definition has built-in contradictions. It is aimed at and accountable to, not the constituency that it depicts, but the foreign audience whose political engagement is solicited, and not all solidarity film-makers are able to make it to the end of the tightrope, ethically, politically and artistically. For example, is Ivens’ emphasis on the theme of China's cultural heritage, however stirring, simply a safe discourse for liberal American audiences, nervous about the Communists and embarrassed by the Guomindang? Or was it simply the result of the censors’ greater willingness to let the film-makers shoot innocuous cultural monuments more than any other subject? Or symptomatic of the film’s significant lacunae for film-makers as well as censors and critics – perhaps even including the commentary’s

insinuation that ‘one-fifth of humanity’ would be less worthy of support against the Japanese were they not so culturally endowed? No doubt all of these cynical scenarios apply in part. These liabilities of the solidarity genre became exacerbated in the case of Ivens’ first China film, not only by the volatile frontline conditions but also by the tension, if not active hostility, between his two rival host groups, the Guomintang and the Eighth Route Army, then allied in precarious coalition. Moreover each rival faction seemed to have a specific aesthetic style connected to it: the Guomintang favouring static newsreel-style displays of ceremonial unity, and the communists tending to be associated (at least in Ivens’s mind) with a more spontaneous style, *proto-vérité*. Ivens was anxious about this awkward hybridity in the final product, and the complex post-production soundtrack efforts in New York, including much post-dubbing of Chinese figures’ voices and the insertion of Chinese musical motifs, constituted a valiant and partly successful endeavour both to heighten visually weak portions of the film and to enrich its sound-image relationships, as well as to overcome the visible contradictions of the solidarity genre and the shortcomings of the foreigner’s gaze.

Inextricable from the film’s acrobatic vacillations between spontaneous cinematography and the much more prevalent *mise-en-scène* are certain ideological dynamics in the final work. Ivens’ evaluation of this film in his letter to his New York colleague stressed the continuing ultimate relevance, despite the insurmountable problems he had encountered, of ‘discipline and serving of cause Number One’ (Ivens 1969: 145).³ *The 400 Million* seems more than consistent with this stress, paradoxically, in terms of its submission to the Communists’ well-known Popular Front strategy of ‘self-censorship’ within mainstream anti-fascist alliances (for example the cryptic identifications of the Eighth Route Army individuals in the film, including most

³ His Hong Kong impressions are remembered on pp.148–149.

notably Chou En-lai). Through all of these elisions, structural flaws, subtexts, and overstatements, *The 400 Million* foregrounds the contradictions of this strategy more than any other Popular Front film. Ultimately, whatever retroactive validity we might accord 'Cause Number One,' and despite the exacerbated tensions inherent in the solidarity genre and the torturous production context of this work, it may seem surprising that *The 400 Million*-- the first episode in Ivens's life-long engagement with China--holds up fairly well in its moments of revelation and commitment. Ultimately Ivens' secret symbolic gesture of passing his camera on to the Red Army (so that cinematic self-reliance would also become a part of the defence against Japan) must ultimately be seen as the most significant solidarity statement within, or rather beyond, the text of *The 400 Million*. If it can also be seen as a final gesture of frustration with the solidarity genre itself; nevertheless, Ivens would return dozens of times to the genre over the next half-century, in China, and around the world.

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