

X - 78 - 71. P.M. February 8, 1944, "Movies" by John T. McManus - discusses  
China Girl - the movie in which Gene Tierney was the star.

Speaking of

## MOVIES

By JOHN T. MCMANUS

## Communique on 'China Girl'

In the light of new and illuminating communique on the subject of China and the movies we make about her, it appears now that *China Girl*, playing at the Roxy, is not even the honest eyewash I thought it was on reviewing it. It further appears, and this is the more serious conclusion for domestic consumption, that 20th Century-Fox, the studio which so zealously bungled at least two previous movies dealing with friends of the United Nations family, has boggled still another.

This communique, from a tested American friend and interpreter of China who prefers to stay anonymous in the field of movie criticism, makes it pretty clear that 20th Century-Fox and its much-vaunted research department failed properly to consult even so much as a map of China as background for *China Girl*. There are more serious derelictions, but let's let the communique speak for itself:

"The authors of this script do not even know the simplest geography. They show the Japanese in Liuchow, a city in Kwangsi that has never once been occupied by the Japanese. To occupy it would mean to occupy most of Kwangsi Province. Then again, the hero photographer and an American pilot are shown arguing about where they shall land up in China—in Kunming or in Yunnan. They have quite an argument about this, and finally decide to land in Kunming. Kunming and Yunnan are two names for the same city!

"The film shows an air-raid on a school in which the Chinese girl and her father are teaching war orphans. The bombs rain down on the school, wrecking it, killing some of the children. The girl and her father are shown repeatedly ordering the children back to their desks to continue studying. Only when they are both killed do they stop.

"Now in China, war is not a Hollywood idiom. If any Chinese teacher acted as those two did in the film, he would be court-martialed and shot. Chinese take their children to dugouts and other places of safety during air raids. They are not blithering idiots . . .

"The Chinese girl (Gene Tierney) is shown falling in love with this hero almost at first sight, and refusing to kiss him im-

mediately, which seemed to indicate something genteel. But she cuddled up and began kissing a second time, and kept it up throughout. Now, kissing in China is an act confined to the bed-room of married people only; it is, badly speaking, considered part of the sex act. So this film was shocking to me; for I could see what a harmful effect it would have if sent to China; and because it gives a totally false idea of China. I hated it also because girls of all races seem to be considered Aphrodisians in this country . . .

"In line with this same protest, I also object to an injection of sex in the China War. Hollywood corrupts the American people, but I object to corrupting them in the name of a China that has fought the Japanese for six years."

This is all pretty stinging stuff, and calculated to make a movie critic, or any moviegoer for that matter, feel a little sheepish for falling for the superficial excitements of a movie that so thoughtlessly misinterprets another race in terms of our own loosely-coupled morality. But the sheepish feeling is not important. What is important is that moviegoers go to the movies with certain implicit trusts—trusting, for example,

that one of the best-heeled Hollywood studios can be depended on for an honest job of research and an honest attempt to understand other races. This expectation of integrity is no more unreasonable than our expectation that what we buy for sugar, for example, will not turn out to be ground glass or Krazy Water Crystals.

This same studio has pulled muffs like this three times now. The first was on Latin America; another was on Iceland, with a film so offensive the OWI prevented it from ever reaching the maligned isle; and now on China. In the usual American way, three strikes are usually out.

But far from being out, 20th Century-Fox is one of the leading fomenters of protest in Hollywood against the simple suggestion that the Office of War Information be "permitted" to appraise all script dealing with the war on our Allies or our enemies. This proposal, they say, is an attempt to abridge the movies' precious freedom of expression.

Actually, if they abhor co-operation with the OWI so much, Hollywood producers ought to get together and ration themselves to one simple freedom for all—the freedom to make honest films.