

Carolyn Bloomer's  
**2012**  
**CHINESE FILM LIST**  
A Guide for American Viewers

© Carolyn M Bloomer, Ph.D.  
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Sarasota, Florida

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# Acknowledgements

Thanks go first of all to Peggy Roney, President of the US-China Peoples Friendship Association – Southern Region, for her unwavering support and enthusiasm for this project. Peggy was the first person to ask if I would share information and resources about films I had been showing in Sarasota, as part of a project she is creating for the Southern Region chapters and for USCPFA-National for chapters nationwide, to develop chapter membership and retention. It just so happened that I was already in the midst of writing a book that would include synopses of over 100 Chinese films. We both immediately realized that the *Film List* was an imminently doable project.

But I needed someone to help with the tedious detail work needed to prepare the list for public distribution. Peggy found the perfect helper. Christa Ernst, member of US-China Peoples Friendship Association--Atlanta and the Atlanta chapter's Film Committee, is a recent graduate of Georgia State in Asian Studies with a focus on Chinese language, history; and international policy; she had spent a semester in Shanghai, and is an avid consumer of Chinese films and literature. The Chinese call this *yuanfen* 缘分, and it means that in the indeterminate field of potential events, sometimes really good stuff happens. Christa has added immeasurably to the quality of the *Film List*; not only did she tirelessly ferret out the accuracy of names, dates, spellings, and Chinese characters, but her familiarity with Chinese history, literature, and with many of the movies themselves enabled her to add enriching information and dimensions to the film descriptions. Thank you, Christa!

Next is Zhang Yunhao 张昀浩, a recent graduate of Zhejiang University (which has recently nudged Tsinghua out of first place as China's #1 university) who is currently studying Computer Animation at Ringling College. In another instance of *yuanfen* 缘分, this bright and immensely knowledgeable young man turned out to be an avid film buff. Besides acting as a natural authority on questions of Chinese language, Yunhao has cleared up numerous cross-cultural puzzlements and offered thoughtful insights on films from a Chinese perspective. 小张, 谢谢你!

Lastly, I must thank the many attendees at the regular Chinese film series that I have held over the past seven years on the Ringling College campus, which have been co-sponsored by the USCPFA-Sarasota, the Gulfcoast Chinese American Association, and Sarasota Sister Cities Association. Post-screening discussions with this broad and varied audience, composed mostly of nonacademic residents of the Sarasota area, has created wonderful opportunities for 'field testing' the reception and meaningfulness of Chinese films for American audiences.

Please keep an eye out for my forthcoming book: *China through Film: A Guide for American Viewers*, which will place many of these films in a detailed historical and cultural context. China looms large on the horizon of everyone's future, but most particularly the future of our younger generations. My greatest hope is that this List of Chinese films will contribute to the cross-cultural understanding and respect that is the essential basis for world peace.

Please, send me your comments and communications.

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NOTES:

- 1) Unless otherwise noted, all films are in color, with Mandarin soundtrack and English subtitles.
- 2) (女) *nu* designates a female director.
- 3) If a title is **underlined**, a “Short Take” is available as a pdf file on request from Carolyn Bloomer. Short Takes are designed to be used as one-sheet handouts at community or academic film showings. They give contextual notes about the film, its historical and cultural setting, and the director, and usually suggest comparison films as well. E-mail requests to [cbloomer@c.ringling.edu](mailto:cbloomer@c.ringling.edu).
- 4) Most of these films are situated in their broader historical and cultural contexts in Dr. Bloomer's forthcoming book *China through Film: A Guide for American Viewers*.
- 5) In regard to the use of Chinese written characters, this list follows the standard practice of major databases in the People's Republic of China (PRC), which is to use ‘simplified’ characters 简体字 *jiǎntǐzì* throughout.
- 6) Please e-mail questions, suggestions, edits, or corrections to [cbloomer@c.ringling.edu](mailto:cbloomer@c.ringling.edu).

1 **Army Nurse** 女儿楼 *Nuer lou*

Hu Mei (女) 胡玫, Li Xiaojun-李晓军, August First Film Studio, 1985. 95 min.

In the middle of the Cultural Revolution, a 15-year old girl, whose father enlisted her as an army nurse is assigned to a hospital in a remote area, where she lives and works with other young women each of whom has her own life story. The women are forbidden to date, and giving in to personal desires is seen both as a character weakness and unpatriotic; the consequence is disapproval, shame and severance from the work-unit. Exemplary nurses, on the other hand, may hope to be rewarded by being sent to medical school and awarded Communist Party membership. The young woman develops an unspoken passion for one of the patients, a handsome army officer. When he is discharged, she follows him to the bus, but is unable to express her feelings. Later she receives a letter from him, but panics for fear of discovery and flushes the letter down the toilet. For the next 15 years she conceals her private longings, and publicly pursues professional advancement through membership in the Communist Party. At the age of 30 she agrees to a marriage promoted by the Party leader, but returns to the hospital, thinking of what she's lost over the past 15 years. A classic film reflecting on the Cultural Revolution, by a woman director who gives a feminine perspective on the psychology of giving up personal freedoms for professional/revolutionary advancement, and produced by the official PLA film studio.

Setting: Cultural Revolution c. 1960

2 **Aftershock** 唐山大地震 *Tangshan dizhen*

Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚, 2010. 135 min.

In 1976 more than 250,000 people died in an earthquake in Tangshan (Hebei Province), an industrial city of more than a million population. This fictional story of one family's trauma and separation follows their separate lives for the next thirty years – until rescue workers from Tangshan converge at the site of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. A riveting and poignant film from one of China's most gifted and popular directors. Based on the novel *Aftershock* 《餘震》 by Chinese born Canadian author Zhang Ling-张翎 and the first IMAX film produced outside the United States.

Setting: 1977 – 2008. Tangshan 唐山 (Hebei Province 河北省).

- 3 **Ashes of Time Redux** 东邪西毒 *Dong xie xi du*  
Wong Kar-wai 王家卫 (Mandarin *Wang Jiawei*), Hong Kong, 1994, 2008. 93 min. Cinematographer Christopher Doyle  
Stars Leslie Cheung, both Tony Leungs, Brigitte Lin, Maggie Cheung.  
This is a re-edited and color-intensified version of the award-winning 1994 fluid, often visually breathtaking postmodern martial arts film by Hong Kong's premier art-film director. The cinematography interplays intimate and moody close-ups with blurs of black and color action resembling abstract expressionist brushwork. The newer version uses chapter inter-titles to demarcate separate segments of what sometimes seems a disjointed narration by a prematurely retired swordsman who acts as a dispassionate agent for hired killers. The faithful may prefer the more subdued coloring of the earlier version. This is one of several seminal cinematic masterpieces in which gifted directors transcend the conventions of the *wuxia*- 武侠 (martial arts) genre by integrating skilled martial arts action with a range of human emotions and lyric imagery. Loosely based on the martial arts novel *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* 《射鵰英雄传》 by Hong Kong author Jin Yong-金庸.  
Setting: Southern Song Dynasty 南宋(1127–1279) Zhejiang province 浙江省 and surrounding areas.
- 4 **The Assassin** 大刺客 *Da cike*  
Zhang Che 张彻, Hong Kong, 1967. 112min. Starring Wang Yu 王羽  
Perhaps the most famous director of 1960s *wuxia* films (*One Armed Swordsman*, 1967; *Golden Swallow* aka *Come Drink with Me*, 1967), partnered with Wang Yu an equally famous actor of the time. During the Warring States period, Nie Zheng is a student at a school for training commoners in sword-fighting, where his master bequeaths him the sword of one who committed suicide with it while serving the state of Chu. When the Master is murdered, Nie realizes that his skill and strong body are destined to serve a higher purpose. Eventually, he conspires with a rich nobleman to fulfill his destiny by taking on a suicide mission to assassinate the Premier. Elegant and moody cinematography; includes strong women characters. An exemplar of the new trend in the 1960s toward introducing character-driven motives into martial arts dramas.  
Setting: Warring States period (470-221 BCE) Qin and Han regions (near present day Zhengzhou 郑州, Henan Province 河南省).
- 5 **Assembly** 集结号 *Jinjie hao*  
Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚, 2007. 124 min.  
Better known for his comedies and popular films of urban life, China's most popular film director gives us a serious and powerful film about war, fierce loyalty to fallen comrades, and dogged pursuit of just recognition. The first half of the film, set in 1948 during a determining battle late in the civil war between the Red Army and the Nationalists (1945-48), has been compared to *Saving Private Ryan* in the intensity and realism of its battle scenes. The second half of the film focuses on the captain's dogged quest to memorialize the death of his men in the face of bureaucratic indifference. Winner of the 2008 Hundred Flowers award and 2009 Golden Rooster award for best film.  
Setting: 1948, Huaihai Campaign 淮海战役, Xuzhou-徐州, Jiangsu Province 江苏省; after 1953 (end of the Korean War).
- 6 **Back to Back Face to Face** 背靠背脸对脸 *Bei kao bei lian dui lian*.  
Huang Jianxin 黄建新, 1994. 144min.  
An excellent and realistic film about the dynamics of *danwei* 单位 life in the late '80s/e90s and the inevitable and inescapable intrigues, spats, and petty revenges involved in positioning oneself and others in *guanxi* 关系 networks of obligation and reciprocity. Well-liked and respected Acting Director Wang of the Cultural Center in a medium-sized city lives in a walk-up apartment with his wife, young daughter, and his widowed father, a shoe-repairman. After being overlooked for promotion to Director, Wang's loyal colleagues engage in subtle revenge strategies, while Wang's father carries out his own devious maneuvers to get permission for

Wang's wife to have a second child because he wants a grandson. A great film for discussing moral dilemmas and how they are solved in the Chinese context.  
Setting: Late 80s, early 90s; Xi'an 西安, Shaanxi Province 陕西省.

- 7 **The Banquet** 夜宴 *Ye yan*  
Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚, 2006. 134 min.  
Stars Ge You, Zhang Ziyi, Zhou Xun. Choreography: Yuen Woo-Ping.  
Set in 907 at the end of the Tang Dynasty, this film about palace intrigue involves imprisonments, executions, sexual powers, and complicated blood, family and succession relationships. Despite its superficial references to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, this is a deeply Chinese film in its dramatization of female ambition, and its continually transforming configurations of yin/yang and karmic relationships. The cinematography and wire-work are outstanding.  
Setting: Late Tang Dynasty, Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period 五代十国 (618-907 CE) Filmed in Hangzhou 杭州, Anji County 安吉县, Zhejiang Province-,浙江省; Xiaotangshan, Changping District of Beijing 小汤山, 昌平区: 北京; Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region 新疆维吾尔自治区.
8. **Beauties** 丽影倾情 *Liying qingqing*  
Cinema Hong Kong Documentary Series, 2003. 50 min.  
In the 60s and 70s, in Hong Kong's Golden Age of (Mandarin) Film, Shaw Brothers Studios translated popular Chinese culture into historical epics, opera, musicals, drama, erotica, and martial arts films. In the mid-60s, Run Run Shaw created a Hollywood-style studio-star system, cultivating about 50 famous "film beauties", many of whose careers are highlighted in this documentary, which includes clips from numerous films in addition to present-time reminiscences by Ivy Ling Po (Liang Shanbo in *Love Eterne*), Lili Ho, and Cheng Peipei (Jade Fox in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*). A great companion piece to any of the Shaw Brothers films featuring these actresses.  
Setting: Hong Kong 香港, 60s – 00s.
- 9 **Beijing Bicycle** 十七岁的单车 *Shiqisui de danche*  
Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅, 2001, 108 min.  
Contemporary urban issues and values, as well as Chinese approaches to conflict resolution, are acted out in this escalating and sometimes violent struggle between a young bicycle courier whose bike is stolen and the vocational student who claims to own it. The viewer will get a feel for the *hutong* life in Beijing as the riders maneuver through the narrow neighborhood lanes -- aspects of Beijing life that are quickly disappearing with modernization and urban development. Won the Jury Grand Prix Silver Bear Award at the 2001 Berlin Film Festival. Although sometimes compared to Vittorio De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), the film is thoroughly rooted in contemporary Chinese culture.  
Setting: Late 90s, Beijing 北京.
- 10 **Be There or Be Square** 不见不散 *Bújiàn bú sàn*  
Feng Xiaogang-冯小刚, 1998. 103 min  
Stars Ge You  
This New Year Blockbuster Romance-Drama follows the seemingly unpromising relationship of two Beijing natives in Los Angeles as they struggle to make a living and cross paths romantically through the process. Liu, a drifter scouting for a movie location for a Chinese film crew, re-encounters Li, a former acquaintance and convinces her to allow the crew to use a mansion that she is house-sitting for friends. The scheme falls apart when, Liu purchases a return ticket to Beijing for Li, supposedly as repayment for the fiasco but in reality to get her out of his hair. Li did not use the plane ticket and still in LA the two run into each other a year later, only to find themselves again involved in a series of mini-catastrophes and vowing never to see each other again. Again and again Destiny pulls the two together -- always with the

same results.

Setting: . Los Angeles, late 1990s.

11 **A Better Tomorrow** 英雄本色 *Yingxiong bense*

John Woo 吴宇森 (Mandarin *Wu Dingsen*), Hong Kong, 1986. 95 min.

Stars Chow Yun Fat.

Two brothers: the older, Ho, is a successful counterfeiter in partnership with a syndicate; he is greatly admired by his younger brother, Kit, an ambitious rookie Hong Kong cop who is unaware of his brother's true lifestyle. When Ho is sent to jail, Kit becomes bitter. Ho and his partner try to reform, but the syndicate boss has plans to foil Kit's investigation. Lots of well-choreographed balletic gun battles and gangster action support a well-structured plot driven by the mutual life-and-death obligations integral to *yiqi* 义气 – the code of brotherhood, personal loyalty, and honor – and the transformations of opposing forces in constant movement toward balance. Hong Kong critic Stephen Teo (1997) called this “the single most representative, most classically perfect Woo picture”.

Setting: c. 1985, Hong Kong 香港

12 **Big Shot's Funeral** 大腕 *Dahuan*

Feng Xiaogong-冯小刚, 2001, 100 min.

Stars Donald Sutherland, Ge You, Rosalind Kwan

This witty satire on globalization and the rampant obsession in today's China with making money by almost any means was released just before China's entry into the WTO. Tyler, an aging American film director, is in Beijing to do a remake of *The Last Emperor*. His loyal and protective bilingual assistant, Lucy, hires cameraman Yoyo to video a behind-the-scenes documentary of the making of the film. Tyler continually ruminates on the meaning of life and death – a topic that becomes of more than philosophical interest when he suddenly suffers a heart attack and expresses his wish for a Chinese “comedy funeral”. While Tyler languishes in a coma, Yoyo attempts to finance Tyler's last wish by selling advertising space at the funeral to a shark pool of media opportunists willing to do almost anything to turn a profit. The plot thickens when – after all the advertising space has been sold -- it seems that Tyler is not going to die after all.

Setting: c. 2000, Beijing 北京.

13 **Black Cannon Incident** 黑炮事件 *Hei pao shijian*

Huang Jianxin-黄建新, 1986. 95 min.

In his spare time an eccentric engineer and interpreter for a German mining company in China likes to play solitaire chess. During a business trip to another city, he finds he's lost one of his chess pieces (the black cannon). Although the piece doesn't have monetary value, he feels a personal attachment and wants to retrieve it, so he sends a telegram to the hotel where he stayed. His superiors, who keep surveillance on him, interpret the telegram as a coded message and suspect him of being a spy. A black comedy considered one of the seminal Fifth Generation films.

Setting: 1980s , indeterminate location in China.

14 **Blind Mountain** 盲山 *Mang shan*

Li Yang-李杨, 2007. 95 min.

The distressing story of a fresh college graduate kidnapped under the pretense of being taken to a well-paying job selling medicinal herbs. She awakes to find herself in the custody of a family who paid 7000 元 for her. She fights her “husband” but is physically restrained so he can rape her. She runs away but is caught and comes to understand the impossibility of her situation. She makes friends with a local teacher who brings her books; the two develop an affair, but are discovered. She exchanges sex with a shopkeeper for money for a bus ticket but is caught. She tutors children, has a son, and smuggles a letter out. When police arrive with her father, the mother-in-law insists on taking the baby. The young woman defends her father in his fight

against her husband in a stunning climax to a brutal story. Based on a real, although not prevalent, practice of kidnapping women for sale to uneducated and often abusive families in impoverished areas which many local women have abandoned in favor of factory work. Filmed in Shaanxi and Sichuan dialects and with several alternate endings to allow for a mainland China release.

Setting: Early 90s, Village in the Qin Mountains-秦岭, Shaanxi Province 陕西省.

15 **Blind Shaft** 盲井 *Mang jing*

Li Yang-李杨, 2002. 92 min.

Depressing but masterful thriller about scam artists who recruit unsuspecting miners, arrange their demise in mine «accidents» and then collect the insurance. Shot in a semi-documentary cinema verite style, the film used nonprofessional actors except for the lead characters. The drama derives from the opportunism afforded by the newly unleashed ‘capitalist’ economy interfacing with the well-known inhuman and often illegal conditions of Chinese coal-mining. Based on the short story *Sacred Wood* 《神木》 by Liu Qingbang.

Setting: 1990s, in the border between Hebei-河北省 and Shanxi- 山西省 provinces

16 **Blood of the Leopard** 水浒传之英雄本色, *Shui hu zhuan zhi yingxiong bense*

Billy Wui-Ngai Chan 陈会毅 (Mandarin *Chen Huiyi*), Hong Kong, 1992. 91 min.

Roughly based on chapters 7 from the Song dynasty novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* aka *The Water Margin* aka *All Men are Brothers* (水浒传), the movie follows the fortunes of Imperial Guard Instructor Lin Chong, who is framed by his evil commander and betrayed by his colleague. Befriending a renegade officer-turned-monk, Lin Chong finds himself facing the loss of all he holds dear. Non-stop action, elaborate sets, beautifully photographed and a great introduction to some of China’s most beloved folk heroes – but as one viewer commented: as with most Chinese wire-flying costume epics, “it’s best to ‘check your brain at the door’ and just go along for the ride”.

Setting: Song Dynasty 宋朝 c.1100 CE, Huai River 淮河 area (about halfway between the Yellow 黄河 and the Yangzi 长江 Rivers, comprising the dividing line between northern and southern China).

17 **Blue Kite** 篮风筝 *Lan Fengzheng*

Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮, 1993. 138min.

Narrated by the voice of a young adolescent boy, each of the film’s three segments is named for the boy’s father-figure at the time. In Part I (‘Father’), the parents, a librarian and an elementary school teacher, marry in 1953 and live among family, friends and neighbors in ‘Dry Well Lane’, an old Beijing neighborhood; the narrator is born in 1954. During the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957) the father is shipped off to be ‘reeducated’, but dies in an accident. In Part Two (‘Uncle’), his mother marries a family friend who eventually dies of a liver ailment. In Part Three (‘Stepfather’), the mother marries an older Party cadre who can provide material advantages to her and her increasingly difficult adolescent son. The Cultural Revolution erupts; the Red Guards attack the cadre and trash his house. The script can be read as an allegory of the increasingly alienated relations between Chinese people and their well-intentioned but flawed leaders. An important work by a 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Director, the film was banned in China because of its ‘political leanings’, although it won several top international awards.

Setting: 1953 - Cultural Revolution 文化大革命, Beijing 北京.

18 **Breaking the Silence** 漂亮妈妈 *Piaoliang Mama*.

Sun Zhou- 孙周, 2000. 90 min.

Stars: Gong Li

A divorced working mother constantly coaches her young deaf son to speak intelligibly. And, with little help from her ex-husband, a taxi-driver, she labors tirelessly to buy her son a costly modern hearing aid. Although the boy could go to a special school for the deaf, his mother is

obsessed with gaining him admission to a regular school – for which he must pass an oral examination. The mother’s only close moral support comes from a former woman classmate. The film underscores ways in which the traditional support structure of Chinese families and communities is being undermined by processes of modernization in which individual mobility and initiative are rewarded at the expense of traditional filial and familial responsibilities—leaving ordinary working people, like this mother, to struggle. As the mother herself remarks “So much has changed in China. Before, I had my work-unit and a husband. Now I don’t have either.”

Setting: late 90s, Beijing 北京.

19 **Centre Stage** *Ruan Lingyu* 阮玲玉

Stanley Kwan-关锦鹏 (Mandarin *Guan Jinpeng*), 1992. 126 min.

Stars Maggie Cheung

Exquisite meditation on the tragic life of one of the most well-known of China’s silent film stars, Ruan Lingyu, who committed suicide in 1935 at the age of 25, apparently in despair at the sensationalizing of her personal life by the Shanghai press (she was publicly accused of adultery) – an act that mirrored that of the real-life heroine of her last film *New Woman*. Kwan’s film recreates Shanghai lifestyles of the 1930s interwoven with documentary clips of Ruan’s films and reflexive scenes of the making of Kwan’s production. Ruan’s life and death are as well-known by Chinese audiences as that of Marilyn Monroe to American audiences, and thus the film is best appreciated if preceded by some research. Maggie Cheung won several Best Actress awards in international film festivals for her portrayal of Ruan.

Setting: 1930s Shanghai 上海.

20 **Chan is Missing**

Wayne Wang, 1981. B&W.

Cab drivers Jo and his nephew Steve, along with Jo’s niece Amy, search for Chan Hong, another cabbie, who has turned up missing after Jo and Steve gave him \$4000 in a business venture. Jo finds that everyone he has encountered in the search for Chan has a different idea of who he is. This is said to be the first US film to be made with an entirely Asian cast and crew. Considered to be the first film to realistically portray Chinese Americans, the film has been preserved in the US National Film Archives due to its cultural significance.

Setting: c. 1980, San Francisco Chinatown.

21 **Chinese Ghost Story**, 倩女幽魂 *Qiannu Youhun*

Ching Sui-tung 程小东, Hong Kong, 1987. 98 min.

Stars Leslie Cheung

In this comic ghost-story a naive traveling tax collector denied accommodations at the local inn is advised to stay at a temple that turns out to be haunted. Every evening as darkness descends, the world of strange and restless spirits with all their comic and bizarre conflicts come to life. One of the night spirits is an irresistibly beautiful woman who was murdered; her ashes were buried at the base of a malevolent tree spirit, a kind of nether-world “madame” planning to marry her to “the Black Master”. She can escape this horrible fate and gain a chance at reincarnation only if her ashes are retrieved and given a proper burial at her family’s grave-site. Although drawn from Pu Songling’s (1640-1715) classic *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* 《聊斋志异》 *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, the monsters and special effects are definitely 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Setting: Ming Dynasty 大明, Jinhua City 金华市; Zhejiang Province 浙江省.

22 **Chinese Odyssey2002** 天下无双 *Tianxia wushuang*

Jeffrey Lau 刘镇伟 (Mandarin *Liu Zhenwei*), Hong Kong, 2002. 97 min.

Stars Stephen Chow

Set in the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644), beautifully photographed and costumed, and with an up-beat original sound-track, this fast-paced and witty farce is based on gender confusions arising from the disguises assumed by an emperor and princess (brother and sister), who escape

the Forbidden City to mingle with commoners. This screwball comedy genre 无厘头 *wu li tou* (Cantonese: *mo lei tau*) makes you wonder: what if Shakespeare, Mel Brooks, or Monty Python had been Chinese? Lots of references to prior Chinese films and contemporary Hong Kong advertisements, but so fun filled that non-Chinese viewers will remain oblivious to what they are missing.

Setting: Ming Dynasty-大明 (1368 - 1644).

23 **City of Life and Death** 南京！南京！ *Nanjing! Nanjing!*

Lu Chuan-陆川, 2009. 132min. B&W

Dubbed by some “the Chinese *Saving Private Ryan*”, this extremely intense film portrays the relentless and devastating violence perpetrated during the Japanese Rape of Nanjing in 1937 in which over 300,000 Chinese were massacred, as glimpsed from time to time through the all too human eyes of a few conflicted soldiers, Japanese and Chinese, each trapped in endless horror not of their own making from which death is the only escape. Nested within the larger narrative are mini-stories of certain individuals, some historical (e.g., the Chinese resistance leader Lu Jianxiong, the Nazi John Rabe who heads up the Safety Zone, and his Chinese assistant) and some imagined (e.g., the young soldier whose virginal encounter with a prostitute turns into altruistic love).

Setting: December 1937, Nanjing-南京.

24 **Comrades, Almost a Love Story** 甜蜜蜜 *Tian mimi*

Peter Chan-陈可辛(Chen Kexin), Hong Kong, 1996. 116min.

Stars Maggie Cheung and Leon Lai (a Cantonese Pop star)

Termed a “hankie twister” by one reviewer, this critical hit and winner of many awards is a 10-year saga of star-crossed lovers who are illegal immigrants from mainland boondocks in search of a better life in Hong Kong, and later New York City. The title and music of the film pay homage to the Hong Kong chanteuse Teresa Teng who died one year before the film’s release. Won numerous prizes at the 16<sup>th</sup> Hong Kong Film Awards.

Setting: 1986 – 96, Hong Kong 香港 and New York City.

25 **Come Drink with Me** 大醉侠 *Da zui xia*

King Hu 胡金铨 (Mandarin *Hu Jinquan*), Hong Kong, 1966. 95 min.

Stars Cheng Peipei.

A Shaw Brothers production considered by some to be one of the greatest martial arts movies of all times, this film incorporates influences from opera and ballet. A young Cheng Peipei in her second film role at age 16 plays Golden Swallow, a *wuxia* adept and daughter of a provincial governor, who embarks on a mission to rescue her brother, a minor official being held hostage by a gang of bandits in exchange for the release of their chief. She is helped by Drunken Cat, a gongfu master in the guise of a beggar. Some DVDs include wonderful interviews with Cheng Peipei and others involved in the production. In order to emphasize the rhythm and action of traditional Beijing Opera styles, Hu intentionally chose Cheng Peipei and the choreographer because they were not experienced with martial arts film.

Setting: Ming Dynasty 大明.

26 **Confucius** 孔子 *Kongzi*

Hu Mei (女) 胡玫, 2010. 119 min.

Stars Chow Yun Fat

Released as a lavish New Year’s film, this spectacular epic biopic marked both the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic and Confucius’ 2560<sup>th</sup> birthday. It depicts the life of Confucius (551-479BCE) during the unsettled Spring and Autumn period when he begins to spread his ideas about ideal government and the means to a peaceful and harmonious society. After receiving an appointment that enables him to put some of his tradition-breaking ideas into practice, however, he angers the aristocracy and rulers of surrounding kingdoms. Confucius and his disciples spend the next years wandering in exile

until the aging Master is finally allowed to return home and put together his writings.  
Setting: c. 500BCE, Zhou Dynasty-周朝: Spring and Autumn period-春秋时代, just preceding Warring States-战国时代. Confucius lived most of his life in the feudal state of Lu-鲁国 in present day Shandong Province-山东省 (although the movie was filmed in Hebei-河北 and Zhejiang-浙江 provinces).

- 27 **Crazy Stone** 疯狂的石头 *Fengkuang de shitou*  
Ning Hao 宁浩, 2006. 106 min.

The highest grossing domestically produced film of 2006, this fast paced and hilarious Tarantinoesque dark comedy follows several different thieves and their colleagues as they converge on the theft of a valuable jade discovered in a dilapidated factory building and placed in a local temple under the protection of a former police detective his colleagues. A cat-burglar hired by a greedy developer, a gang of three not-very-bright con-men, and a photographer, all in direct competition to gain possession of the stone, become more and more desperate as the fast-moving and elaborate plot progresses with multiple switches reminiscent of a shell-game. Within its humorous frame, however, the film touches on such relevant social phenomena as real estate speculation, “Little Emperors” (pampered single children), petty street crime, and corruption. The film also has a number of “insider” references to scenes in *Mission Impossible* and *Infernal Affairs*. Adding to the frenetic pace, the movie was filmed in multiple dialects (Cantonese- 粤语, Mandarin-普通话, Sichuanese-四川话, and Henanese-河南话).

Setting: c.2005, Chongqing 重庆, Sichuan Province 四川省.

- 28 **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon** 卧虎藏龙 *Wohu canglong*  
Ang Lee 李安, USA, 2000. Choreography Yuen Woo Ping.  
Stars Michelle Yeoh, Chow Yun Fat, Zhang Ziyi, Cheng Peipei

Wu Dang master swordsman Li Mu Bai and woman warrior Yu Shu Lien attempt to retrieve the stolen Green Destiny legendary sword. In the quest, Master Li confronts his old adversary Jade Fox, who killed his master, and Jade Fox’s protégé, young Jen, a rebellious aristocrat. The plot is sweetened by an unexpressed romance between Li and Yu, who was formerly betrothed to Li’s ‘brother’. A huge international hit despite its ho-hum reception in China. The film is based on the 4th book of Wang Dulu’s-王度庐 wuxia novel series the *Crane-Iron Series* 《鹤铁系列》.

Setting: 1779 (Qing Dynasty 大清帝国, Qianlong period 乾隆帝时代), *jianghu* 江湖 underworld.  
Filmed in Anhui -安徽省, Hebei -河北省, and Jiangsu 江苏省 Provinces; Xinjiang Autonomous Region, 新疆维吾尔自治区; Gobi Desert 戈壁.

- 29 **Crows and Sparrows** 乌鸦与麻雀 *Wuya yu maque*,  
Zheng Junli 郑君里, 1949. 108 min. B&W

In 1948 Shanghai during the last days of the civil war between the Communists and Nationalists, tenants struggle to survive under a corrupt and greedy landlord and high-ranking Nationalist official who plan to sell the building and flee to Taiwan. The film was finished only a few days before the People’s Liberation Army took Shanghai on May 2, 1949. One of the most renowned social commentary films of the era.

Setting: 1948, Shanghai 上海.

- 30 **The Day the Sun Turned Cold** 天国逆子 *Tianguo nizi*  
Yim Ho 严浩 (Mandarin *Yan Hao*), Hong Kong, 1995. 99min.

One day a young man walks into a police station to file a complaint against his mother, a village woman, alleging that ten years earlier she poisoned his father, a school teacher. He offers his own handwritten account of her suspicious behavior around the time of his father’s unexpected death, which was attributed at the time to a brain inflammation. After initially dismissing the case, the inspector agrees to listen to the young man’s childhood memories. Although based on a real-life murder case, the sensitively imaged narrative is multilayered and

often metaphorical in its examination of the complex intersections of filial piety, patriarchy, personal secrecy, generational estrangement, and guilt.

Setting: c. early 90s, Northern China, Heilongjiang Province 黑龙江省.

31 **Detective Dee and the Phantom Flame** 狄仁杰之通天帝国 *Di Renjie zhi tongtian diguo*

Tsui Hark 徐克 (Mandarin *Xu Ke*), Hong Kong, 2010. 123min.

Stars Andy Lau Ka Fai, Carina Lau.

A martial arts extravaganza with an actual plot. In preparation for the coronation of Empress Wu Zetian, China's first and only woman emperor, a gigantic Buddhist statue is in the final stages of completion when several high officials mysteriously self-combust and burn to ashes. To solve the mystery, the Empress frees Judge Di Renjie, who has been imprisoned for the last 8 years, putting him under the surveillance of her favorite maid-in-waiting. Di, a skilled martial artist who trusts no one and disbelieves supernatural explanations, gradually exposes the various duplicitous players. The subtitles can be rather quick and sometimes puzzling, and while the action is not always coherent it is always entertaining. The film's Detective Dee is very promiscuously modeled on the fictional rendition of a well-known Tang Dynasty magistrate in the series of Judge Dee detective novels written in the 1940s by the late Dutch Sinologist Robert van Gulik.

Setting: 690CE, Tang Dynasty 唐朝, capital city of Luoyang 洛阳; just before coronation of Empress Wu Zetian.

32 **Devils on the Doorstep** 鬼子来了 *Guizi laile*

Jiang Wen 姜文, 2000. 139 min.

Stars Jiang Wen.

Set in 1945 toward the end of WWII in northeastern China near the Great Wall in a small village which the Japanese have been occupying since 1937. One night an unidentified person with a gun dumps two bagged and bound prisoners in the home of a villager with instructions to keep them alive, hide them from the Japs, and interrogate them – or risk death. Five days hence, at the New Year, someone will collect the prisoners and their statements. One prisoner is a belligerent Japanese soldier and the other his translator, a Chinese. New Year's comes and goes and no one returns to collect the prisoners. Six months pass and the villagers struggle to come to grips with this confusing situation. Should they kill the prisoners? If so, who will do the deed, and how? Or: can they devise a strategy to turn the prisoners over to the Japanese – perhaps trade them for grain -- and if so, can they avoid the wrath of the Japanese for keeping one of their men hidden all this time? Shot in black-and-white imagery reminiscent of Japanese or Bergman film classics of the 60s and 70s, this powerful movie is alternately absurd and serious, light-hearted and violent, absurdly comic and painfully tragic.

Setting: 1945, Northeastern China, the pass at Xifengkou 喜峰口 along the Great Wall near the Panjiakou Reservoir 潘家口水库.

33 **Dirty Ho** 烂头何 *Lantou He*

Lau Kar-leong 刘家良 (Mandarin *Liu Jiāliáng*) Hong Kong, 1979. 97 min.

The Eleventh Prince, traveling incognito as Wang, a jewelry merchant, is beset upon by Ho, an ill-mannered thief, to whom he administers a poisonous head wound. As Wang is the only person who has the antidote to the poison, Ho is bound to stay with him until the wound is healed, during which time he learns improved *gongfu* skills and better morals. In the meantime, the Prince is the subject of various plots by rivals to the throne. The production is imaginative, beautifully designed and choreographed, and the *gongfu* is witty and fun to watch as it ramifies into the smallest actions. The mutual interdependence of yin-yang forces in *gongfu* styles is a theme of the film. A masterpiece from one of the best *gongfu* action directors of the 1970s. An unusual aspect of the film is casting the Manchu Prince as a hero rather than a Han Chinese; Manchus are more often portrayed as villains.

Setting: Qing Dynasty 大清帝国 (1644-1911), Guangdong Province 广东省.

- 34 **Dragon Town Story** 龙城正月 *Long cheng zheng yue*  
 Yang Fengliang , 1997. 96 min.  
 Town warlord orders an entire family gunned down in the street during a wedding procession. The bride is the secret sole survivor. Nine years later she contracts with a legendary assassin, and assuming disguises, the two embark on a methodical plot to massacre the warlord's family. Multi-layered with spiraling deceptions and constantly surprising revelations, the film moves toward its unpredictable conclusion like a chess game of destiny and karma in which moral space is subject to constant definition and redefinition. Despite occasional weaknesses in the plausibility of the plot, this is a gripping film from start to finish, beautifully photographed, sensitively acted, and masterfully edited. It will be most deeply appreciated, however, by viewers who welcome the opportunity to explore the dynamics of Buddhist moral discourse that lurk beneath the surface. With Chinese directors and locations, a Taiwanese leading actress, and Hong Kong financial backing , this pan-China production reflects the increased liberalization of the Chinese film industry in the late 90s.  
 Setting: Early Republic 中花民国 (c.1911-1925), northern China.
- 35 **The Dream Factory** aka **Party of the First Part, Party of the Second Part** 甲方乙方 *Jiafang yifang*  
 Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚, 1997. 90 min.  
 Stars Ge You.  
 Creative private entrepreneurship is rampant in the new economy – and the Chinese title *Party A and Party B* reflects emerging social changes by using business contract language to define human relationships, thus implying that money can buy happiness. Four friends who are theatre professionals with complementary talents collaborate to create an original business, a “dream factory” where they script and stage a one-day acting-out of a client's fantasy. A book-store clerk dreams of being General Patton. A cook fantasizes surviving torture without revealing secret information. A wife-abuser wants to learn what it's like to be bullied. A rich business man craves rural subsistence on wild vegetables and rice porridge. A famous actress wants to live as an ordinary person. A suicidal bachelor yearns to be desired by a beautiful woman. A man whose wife is dying of liver cancer longs for the two of them to spend her last days peacefully together. Although the ‘dream-makers’ initial motive is to make money, by the end of the film, they have come to re-conceptualize themselves. The first of the “New Year's film” genre (贺岁片 *hesuipian*), *Dream Factory* won the Hundred Flowers Best Feature Award.  
 Setting: Mid 90s, Beijing, -北京.
- 36 **Drunken Master** 醉拳 *Zuiquan*  
 Yuen Woo Ping 袁和平 (Mandarin *Yuan Heping*), Hong Kong, 1978. 98min.  
 Stars Jackie Chan.  
 Young Huang Feihong 黄飞鸿 (Cantonese Wong Fei-hung), an undisciplined youth, is sent by his father, who runs a martial arts school, to apprentice with Beggar Su who has a unique “drunken” fighting style. Young Huang gains a basic foundation in *gongfu*, and Master Su teaches him to drink while acquiring the various styles of the Eight Drunken Ghosts: The movie is non-stop *gongfu* accompanied by Chinese opera-style music with every blow and landing dubbed audible. The story-line is practically non-existent. The comedy is early adolescent-boy slap-stick and irreverence. None of the characters express any particular values, and Chan's character has absolutely no connection with the actual martial arts hero Huang Feihong. It is said in the movie “everyone has his own style, even when learn from the same master” – probably the pithiest thought in the whole film. Nonetheless, some consider this an essential classic, perhaps because Yuen Woo-ping is such a famous martial arts choreographer (*Kill Bill*, *The Matrix*, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, *Iron Monkey*, *Once Upon a Time in China*, and scores of others). *Drunken Master* is a sequel to the film *Snake in Eagle's Shadow*, which uses the same cast and crew, the two films are famous for launching Jackie Chan's career and revitalizing the martial arts film genre by incorporating comedy.  
 Setting: c. 1860, late Qing dynasty 大清帝国, Guangdong Province 广东省.

- 37 **East Palace, West Palace** 东宫西宫 *Dong gong xi gong*,  
Zhang Yuan 张元, 1999. 90min.  
A policeman encounters a gay man in a Beijing park and detains him overnight in a police station. As the night progresses, the man tells his life story, and in the process engages the police officer in a complex, psychological exchange. The narrative is a compelling allegory for strategies with which disempowered persons gain power over their oppressors, and is one of the earliest mainland films to feature contemporary homosexuality. The film's title refers to two parks in central Beijing that were cruising spots for gays, but the names of the parks in turn refer to an ancient imperial configuration in which the Eastern Palace complex was the females-only residence of the Empress and concubines where males (except for eunuchs) were not permitted, while the Western Palace complex was the male-centered seat of government. The script was originally a stage play written by the film's director, which probably influenced the intense character interactions and stark film style. Because of its provocative subject matter, the film underwent post production in France and was released overseas.  
Setting: 1990s, Beijing 北京.
- 38 **The Emperor and the Assassin** 荆轲刺秦王 *Jing Ke ci Qin Wang*  
Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, 1999. 161min.  
Stars Gong Li  
In his passion to unify China into a single nation, Ying Zheng, heir to the (western) Qin Kingdom (who later becomes the notorious First Emperor) sends his concubine Lady Zhao to the (northeastern) Kingdom of Yan as a spy to recruit the famed assassin Jing Ke as part of a devious strategy to give Qin an excuse to make war on Yan and Zhao. The fictional narrative is inspired by an entry by Sima Qian-司马迁 in his *Records of the Grand Historian*- 史記 (109 – 91 BC). concerning the attempt on the life of the King of Qin by Jing Ke. The construction of both the plot and the cinematography resonate with the board game *weiqi*, known in the west by its Japanese name, *Go*.  
Setting: Warring States Period 战国时代(3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE), Kingdoms of Qin- 秦国, Zhao- 赵国, and Yan-燕国.
- 39 **Family** 家(21-episode TV series)  
Wang Jun 汪俊, 2008. @16 hours (each episode is 45 minutes)  
*Family*, a semi-autobiographical novel by Ba Jin, one of China's most famous modern writers, is a perennially popular multigenerational saga of the upper-class Gao family in Chengdu in the 1920s, a time of intellectual ferment and social change associated with the May Fourth Movement and the emergence of new social philosophies. The focus is on three brothers, young men of differing temperaments, but each engaged in his own conflict with their patriarchal grandfather, the traditional family structure, and the social entrapment of women. The photography, acting, pacing, sets and costumes – all are exquisitely done. The subtitles are clear and the language clearly spoken, making it an excellent choice for persons wanting a sustained Mandarin language experience.  
Setting: 1920s, Chengdu 成都市, Sichuan Province 四川省.
- 40 **Farewell My Concubine** 霸王别姬 *Bawang beiji*  
Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, 1992. From the 1991 novel by Lillian Lee. 171 min.  
Stars Gong Li, Leslie Cheung.  
The film opens in 1977, just after the Cultural Revolution ends, and through extended flashback follows the lives of two Beijing Opera stars, Xiaolou and Dieyi, from their boyhood training under a cruel master, through their persecution during the Cultural Revolution. During this time, they become famous in the traditional roles of Xiang Yu, the despotic Western Chu King, and Yuji, his favorite concubine who, upon discovering his impending defeat at the hands of Han troops, finishes a last dance for him by committing suicide in order to release him from any longing for her. The historical transition to Han Dynasty (c.202BCE) can be seen as paralleling the transition from the Republic to the People's Republic, and Dieyi's devotion to

Xiaolou resonates with the concubine's fatal devotion to her doomed king – but with a devastating difference made explicit when Xiaolou snaps to Dieyi, "I'm just an actor playing a king. You really are Yuji." Based on Lillian Lee's novel of the same name, and the only Chinese film to have won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

Setting: 1924-1977, Beijing 北京.

41 **Fist of Fury** aka The Chinese Connection 精武门 *Jingwu*

Lo Wei 罗维, Hong Kong, 1972. 107 min.

Stars Bruce Lee.

Chen Zhen, a martial arts student in the Japanese concession in Shanghai, returns from a trip to find that his teacher has suddenly died. At the funeral, students from a rival Japanese martial arts school present the survivors with a piece of insulting calligraphy reading "Sick Man of Asia" 东亚病夫 *dongya bingfu*. Beside himself with grief and suspecting that his master was poisoned by agents of the Japanese school, Chen becomes consumed with the desire for revenge. Add to this the humiliating treatment of Chinese by the foreign international community. In a scene that can still bring Chinese audiences to cheers, Chen destroys a famous sign at a park entrance that reads "No Chinese or dogs allowed". The intensity of Chen's steely fury and the escalating violence and atrocities that ensue are softened only by a few romantic moments with a woman Chen had intended to marry. Japanese are portrayed as absolutely uncivilized, barbarous, and vile, as is their Chinese interpreter, who lowers himself to all fours to walk like a dog for the Japanese. The final freeze frame leap, in which Chen becomes a martyr to nationalistic fervor, is an iconic film moment. Excellent cinematography and editing; [language?] dubbed version is refreshingly synchronous, and without the usual tinniness. Music and sound effects are often wonderful and amusing. And Lee's physical movements are so like a dancer.

Setting: Late 1930s, Shanghai International Settlement-上海公共租界.

42 **Fleeing by Night** 夜奔 *Ye ben*

Hsu Li-Kong, Yin Chi, China/Taiwan, 2000 119 min

An exquisite film set in Tianjin in the 1930s involving a triangular relationship between a young woman, her fiancé (a cellist who has been studying music in the US), and a male Kun opera lead. The three develop a deep and complex friendship that takes many twists and turns as it endures across many years and hardships. Won Best Film at the Aspen Gay and Lesbian Film Festival -- but its transcendence of gender issues has captivated both gay and straight audiences with its artistry and complexity. The film's official acceptance in China indicates a relaxation in the policies affecting homosexuals and their social recognition on the mainland.

Setting: 1930s, Tianjin 天津

43 **Fong Sai Yuk** 方世玉 *Fang Shiyu*

Yuen Kway 元奎(Corey Yuen; Mandarin *Yuan Kui*), Hong Kong, 1993. 100 min.

Stars Jet Li, Josephine Siao

Fang Shiyu (Cantonese Fong Sai Yuk) is an invincible martial arts folk hero of Guangdong Province, and featured in many martial arts stories of the Qing Dynasty. In this beloved comic film, a young woman's father arranges for the contenders for her hand to duel her mother. Seeking to win the young woman's hand for her son, Fang's mother, a martial arts adept, poses as a male contender, and the young woman's mother ends up being attracted to her male persona. Male and female martial arts are delightfully equal here, and the slapstick humor and social satire hilariously imbued with Hong Kong sensibility. [more on historical basis?]

Setting: Late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century, late Qing Dynasty, Guangdong Province 广东省.

44 **Forever Enthralled** 梅兰芳 *Mei Lanfang*

Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, 2008. 147 min.

Stars Leon Lai, Zhang Ziyi

An elegantly filmed bio-pic of one of China's most famous Beijing Opera stars, directed by one

of China's premier directors. Born into a family line of male opera stars, Mei Lanfang (1894 – 1961) was forced onto the stage at the tender age of 10 because of the death of his mother. An astute and disciplined singer all his life, and utterly devoted to the enrichment and nourishment of the art of Chinese opera, he introduced new and sometimes controversial acting styles into the female roles he played on stage, and in the early 1930s was the first to perform Beijing Opera in the West.

Setting: China, 1904 – 1961, Beijing 北京 and other incidental locations.

45 **Founding of a Republic** 建国大业, *Jian guo daye*

Han Sanping 韩三平, Huang Jianxin 黄建新, 2009 138 min.

This star-studded patriotic epic produced for a domestic audience celebrates the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China; and quickly became one of the highest grossing films in China. Surprisingly even-handed (yet biased), the film humanizes behind-the-scenes personalities and machinations of the 1945-1949 period of civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists, in an apparent attempt to establish historical continuity between the two Republics. The cast features a panorama of more than 150 stars in cameo roles (including Jet Li, Jackie Chan, Zhang Ziyi, Ge You, Andy Lau, etc.). A must for fans of modern Chinese micro-history, but likely to be overload for others on account of the tsunami of names and events with which most Westerners are unfamiliar.

Setting: 1945-49, various places in China.

46 **Frozen** 极度寒冷 *Jidu hanleng*

Wu Ming (Chinese for *Anonymous*; Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅), 1996-7. 90 min.

Avant garde graduate students at Beijing's Central Academy of Art, suffering a particular kind of ennui following the student demonstrations of 1989 (not mentioned in the film) are making performance art. One student (Qi Lei, homonym for "tired spirit"), encouraged by his enigmatic mentor, persists in developing plans for a suicidal "Ice Burial", despite entreaties by his sister, and his photographer girlfriend. Purportedly based on a true incident, this early Sixth Generation film about existential angst ends with a Hitchcockian twist. The filming of the suicidal performance was so dangerous that the actor, Jia Hongsheng, had to be rushed to the hospital after shooting the scene. Wang, the director, worked under the pseudonym Anonymous as he was, at the time, forbidden to officially film movies due to Party disapproval of his previous film *The Days*.

Setting: early 90s, Beijing 北京.

47 **Girl from Hunan** 湘女萧萧 *Xiang nǚ Xiaoxiao*

Director: Xie Fei 谢飞, 1986. 99 min

In rural China in the 1920s, Xiaoxiao, a young teenage girl is married to a 3 year-old boy –not an uncommon practice in traditional China as it spared the girl's parents the additional expense of raising her, and at the same time provided the boy's mother with a live-in baby-sitter and a subservient daughter-in-law young enough to be malleable. In the film, Xiaoxiao is pursued by one of the farmhands and becomes pregnant. The traditional penalty for adultery is death – but also killing a pregnant woman invites misfortune to befall the family. Based on the short story *XiaoXiao* by Shen Congwen.

Setting: 1920s, Western Hunan Province 湖南省西部.

48 **The Goddess** 神女 *Shennu*<sup>s</sup>

Wu Yonggang 吴永刚, 1934. 85 min.

Stars Ruan Lingyu

The Chinese title *Shennu* is an old euphemism for 'prostitute'. Ruan Lingyu, China's 'Greta Garbo', stars as a prostitute working to provide a good education for her illegitimate son despite society's condemnation of her livelihood. A sympathetic school principal allows her son to attend his school, but in the face of objections from other parents is forced to expel the son and resign his position. As she prepares to leave the city and make a new start somewhere

else, the mother discovers that her pimp has stolen all the money she had saved for her son's school fees and used it to pay his gambling debts. She kills him with a wine bottle, and is sent to prison with no hope of ever seeing her son again. The principal comes to her cell and promises to take care of her son. A breakthrough film that portrays a prostitute in a sympathetic light, a moral woman trapped in the immorality of the age, this Third Generation leftist film is seen as symbolic of women's universal "struggle in an unjust world".

Setting: Early 1930s, Shanghai 上海.

49 **Hero** 英雄 *Yingxiong*

Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 2002. 110 min.

Stars Jet Li, Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung, Zhang Ziyi. Cinematography: Christopher Doyle. Musical score: Tan Dun. Martial arts choreography: Ching Siu Tung

The King of Qin (later to become the First Emperor) is seeking to conquer his neighboring states, and numerous assassination plots are launched against him. When word reaches the King that Nameless, a martial arts adept and district prefect, has killed one of the most wanted assassins, he summons Nameless to the palace to reward him and to discover how he was able to accomplish the deed. Nameless presents the king with the swords of three assassins, evidence of their deaths. The film proceeds as a game of strategy in which Nameless must manage to get close enough to the King to kill him with a sword, and the King must uncover his opponent's plan in order to defend himself – a deadly game played out by way of various contradictory explanations of how Nameless acquired the swords of the three assassins. A lavish production dramatizes quintessential Chinese metaphysical values and moral issues in regard to the unification and rulership of China, and conflicting positions about means versus ends – dilemmas that remain relevant in the modern world.

Setting: Qin Dynasty 秦国(221-206BCE), Chang'an (present day Xi'an 西安, Shaanxi Province 陕西省).

50 **Hibiscus Town** 芙蓉镇 *Furongzhen*

Xie Jin 谢晋, 1986. 141 min.

Stars Jiang Wen

Based on the prize-winning 1982 novel *A Small Town Called Hibiscus* by Gu Hua and directed by China's most famous Fourth Generation filmmaker, this immensely popular 'scar literature' melodrama is at once a tender love story and a biting critique of the social injustice propagated through the Cultural Revolution. Because of a hard-working young woman's success in running a bean-curd shop, she is labeled a 'new rich peasant' by a jealous party official and her husband commits suicide. She and another 'rightist' are sentenced to sweep the streets. The two outcasts fall in love, and the woman becomes pregnant. The couple is denied permission to officially marry on the grounds that their affair is a crime. The man is sentenced to 10 years in prison; the woman is placed on probation and gives birth prematurely to a son. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, the two are reunited, and changes in Party policies enable them to once again open a bean-curd shop. *Hibiscus Town* won numerous prizes in China.

Setting: Cultural Revolution 文化大革命 (1966-76).

51 **The Highway**, aka **The Big Road** 大路 *Da lu*

Sun Yu 孙瑜, 1934. 104 min. B&W, silent with added sound-track and subtitles.

The story emphasizes the camaraderie of six young men in a large work-gang building a military highway during the early years of the War of Resistance to Japan. The men make friends with two young women at a local restaurant. A traitorous landlord invites the six to a sumptuous banquet where by surprise attack they are taken prisoners and tied up in a dungeon. Through the clever agency of the women, the men are narrowly rescued and the landlord arrested. The road is completed -- but just as the Nationalist reinforcements arrive, 'enemy' planes strafe the road killing all the main characters, who subsequently 'come to life' as ghosts arising from the bodies of the dead, singing the refrains that opened the film "Sweat and tears! Spare no effort! Let's quickly build the highway to freedom". Filmed at a time when Japanese colonialism was a very real threat, *The Highway* glorified the collective fight of strong Chinese

citizens against an outside aggressor – despite the fact that Chiang Kai-shek’s appeasement policies forbade actually naming ‘the enemy’ in the film. The pastiche of slap-stick humor, patriotic songs, primitive special effects, and the clichéd edge-of-the-seat climax are characteristic of Second and Third Generation movies – but even so, *The Highway* remains today a surprisingly moving film.

Setting: early 30s, northeastern China, probably near Manchuria.

52 **Horse Thief** 盗马贼 *Dao mazi*

Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮, 1988. 88 min.

A slow paced meditative cinema verité film without much plot or dialogue set in the Tibetan high plateau in the early 20s describing the struggle of a man to support his wife and son. Unfortunately he does this by stealing horses and religious items. To keep his clan clear from evil, the thief and his family are banished and forced into a life of wandering, during which time they continue to observe Tibetan Buddhist rituals and pray for help. As winter comes on, the family faces starvation and the man is forced to resume horse stealing with tragic results. The film’s remote setting and focus on non-Han tribal culture and esoteric Buddhist practices present a window into a China not often presented in Chinese productions. Notable as one of the early internationally acclaimed Fifth Generation films, inspired by the director’s relocation experiences during the Cultural Revolution.

Setting: 1923, high Tibetan plateau 青藏高原 (filmed in Tibet 西藏, and Gansu 甘肃省 and Qinghai 青海省 Provinces).

53 **Hong Kong 1941** 等待黎明 *Dengdai liming*

Leong Po-Chih 梁普智 (Mandarin *Liang Puzhi*), Hong Kong, 1984 97 min.

Stars Chow Yun-fat, Cecelia Yip

In this film about friendship and sacrifice, the carefree lives of three friends move toward tragedy as Japanese occupy Hong Kong: the epileptic daughter of a wealthy businessman, her impoverished tough-guy boyfriend, and an actor planning to emigrate to the U.S. or Australia. Won a Hong Kong film award for best cinematography. Hong Kong film historian Steven Teo (1997) has called this Leong’s best film.

Setting: 1941, Hong Kong 香港.

54. **If You Are the One** 非诚勿扰 *Feicheng wu rao*

Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚, 2008. 130 min.

Stars Ge You

Qin Fen, a single newly rich and successful amateur inventor heading toward his late forties conducts an on-line search for “a sane, healthy woman”. After interviewing and rejecting several respondents, he meets Smiley, a beautiful airline stewardess stuck in a dead-end relationship with a married man, who wants friendship, not romance. She agrees to marry him as long as he will allow her to keep a place in her heart for the other man. Wanting more second place, Qin embarks upon a dogged campaign to help Smiley get over her unrequited love – with unanticipated results. Sophisticated and very witty in regard to modern life and relationships.

Setting: Late 2000s, Hangzhou 杭州 and surrounds; Hokkaido, Japan.

55 **In the Mood for Love** 花样年华 *Huayang nianhua*

Wong Kar-wai 王家卫 (Mandarin *Wang Jiawei*), Hong Kong, 2000

Stars Tony Leung Chiu-Wai, Chan (Maggie Cheung. Cinematographer Christopher Doyle.

Two couples move into next door apartments on the same day and begin a casual acquaintance. Gradually the husband of one couple and the wife of the other come to suspect their respective spouses of adultery with one another, and at the same time find themselves more preoccupied with one another than with their focus on revenge. Unwilling to lower themselves to the same level of deception, they instead develop a platonic and creative friendship as co-writers. A more accessible and restrained film than usual by Hong Kong’s premier art-film director.

Transcendent acting and cinematography with a meaning laden score, the film forms a trilogy, in a vague manner, with Wong's other films *The Days of Being Wild* (1990) and *2046* (2004).  
Setting: Late 90s, Hong Kong 香港.

56 **Infernal Affairs** 无间道 *Wujian dao*

Andrew Lau Wai-Keung 刘伟强 (Mandarin *Liu Weiqiang*), Alan Mak 麦兆辉 (Mandarin *Mai Zhaohui*), Hong Kong, 2002. 101 min.

Stars Andy Lau, Tony Leung Chiu Wai

The 10-year story of two moles. A rookie cop is assigned to do undercover work as a member of a criminal triad, his true identity known only to two other policemen. At the same time, a young mobster in the same triad is assigned by the boss to enter the police academy to become an undercover cop. Finally both sides realize there is a traitor in their midst, and each is assigned to ferret out the spy (i.e., himself). In addition to a clever plot, and fast-moving cell-phone strategies, the movie also brings into play the psychological perplexities of living a lie for 10 years, thus transcending the realm of typical gangster action thrillers. An immensely popular film in Hong Kong and abroad, it was remade in 2006 as the Academy Award winning *The Departed*, directed by Martin Scorsese.

Setting: Early 2000s, Hong Kong.

57 **Iron Monkey** 少年黄飞鸿之铁猴子 *Shaonian Huang Feihong zhi Tie Houzi*

Yuen Woo-ping 袁和平, Hong Kong, 1992. 86 min.

Huang Feihong (1847-1924), martial artist and physician, is an historic figure who has been the subject of innumerable Chinese stories, films, and TV series. In this film, he is a young boy whose father, a physician intending to purchase herbs, arrives in a village run by corrupt bureaucrats who arrest both father and son following the father's display of his martial arts skill. He is released on the condition that he find and flush out within seven days the "Iron Monkey", a mysterious masked hero who robs the rich and gives to the poor. Father and son find refuge in the household of a local physician, who is actually the Iron Monkey. The film contains a number of classic features of *gongfu* movies, and climaxes in a spectacular confrontation atop tall poles that have been set afire at their base.

Setting: Late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Qing Dynasty 大清帝国), Guangdong Province 广东省.

58 **Ju Dou** 菊豆,

Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1990. 98min.

Stars Gong Li, Li Baotian

A gripping and exotic drama about a young woman who is bought by and married to an impotent and abusive old man, and who carries on an adulterous affair with her husband's adopted nephew who is also often the object of his uncle's abuse. Ju Dou becomes pregnant and the affair is discovered by the now paralyzed uncle who attempts to kill the child. The child grows from sullen youth into a strange and murderous teenager. Set in a dye factory, the mise-en-scène make the most of narrative opportunities afforded by pre-industrial technology and saturated dye colors. Banned for a time in mainland China, the film is perhaps a dark allegory of feudalism, communism, and China as bedfellows generating twisted offspring. By one of the most acclaimed Fifth Generation directors and the first Mainland Chinese film to be nominated for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards (1990).

Setting: 1920s, rural China.

59 **Keep Cool** 有话好好说 *You hua hao hao shuo*

Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1997. 93 min.

Stars Jiang Wen, Ge You, Li Baotian

In Zhang Yimou's first urban comedy a small-time Beijing bookseller is in love with a gold-digger whose rich bully of a night-club owner boyfriend has the bookseller beaten up. In the fray, an innocent bystander's brand-new laptop computer gets broken. The bystander is a dour middle-aged intellectual researcher who becomes obsessed with getting compensated for his loss. The bookseller wants revenge. However these two natural allies have different

perspectives on justice, which are “debated” in wittily hilarious conversations and cat-and-mouse chases. A fast-paced black comedy based on the novel *Evening Paper News* by Shu Ping.

Setting: Late 90s, Beijing 北京

60

**King of Masks** 变脸 *Bian lian*

Director: Wu Tianming 吴天明, 1996. 101 min.

Stars Zhu Xu

In this intensely engaging drama, an aging street performer buys a child he assumes is a boy to whom he can pass on his family art of ‘face changing’. But: the boy turns out to be a girl whose desperate desire to give the old man what he wants brings about a series of disasters. Stars Zhu Xu (*Shower*) and Jiang Wu (*To Live*). Knowing something of the history of the Buddha at Leshan (as familiar to Chinese audiences as Mount Rushmore or George Washington’s cherry tree are to Americans), is important to appreciating the structure of the film narrative. Buddhist themes are further articulated through various forms of the Bodhisattva Guanyin 观音菩萨 (Goddess of Mercy); although male in India, Guanyin takes on a female form in Chinese Buddhism – and hence presents a certain essential gender ambiguity embodied in the film by a popular opera star.

Setting: 1920s, Leshan 乐山市, Sichuan Province 四川省.

61

**Lan Yu** 篮宇

Stanley Kwan 关锦鹏 (Mandarin *Guan Jinpeng*), Hong Kong, 2001. 87min.

Lan Yu, a young gay architecture student, develops a one-sided relationship with an older successful and well-connected businessman who insists that he’s just out for fun. The two begin living together in a luxury villa, and the older man meets and marries a woman. Heart-broken, Lan Yu moves out, but one day the two men accidentally meet. The business man is now divorced and facing legal charges for corruption. At great expense to himself, Lan Yu is able to rescue his former lover – but all is not happy in the end. A far better gay movie than *Brokeback Mountain*. No issues other than the love affair.

Setting: 1988, Beijing 北京

62

**Last Train Home** 归途列车 *Guitu lieche*

Fan Lixin 范立欣, 2009. 85min. Documentary

A moving “slice of life” documentary of a family in which the mother and father left their two children in their home village in the care of their grandparents for sixteen years in order to improve the family’s lot in life by becoming workers in a jeans factory, able to return home only once a year at New Year’s. When the film opens, the daughter is 17 years old; angry and hostile toward her parents and determined to drop out of school and become “independent”. Her younger brother, is quiet, a good student. The film is gripping from start to finish. For those who’ve been to China and ridden the trains, it is unsettlingly familiar. Those who’ve never been to China may begin to understand why the Chinese government had to put brakes on population growth. Those who cheer China’s move to a market economy will be sobered by the human consequences for a huge segment of the Chinese population, and by the desperation parents attach to their children’s education as the only way up and out of the cycle of poverty. And perhaps many of us will never look at a pair of jeans in quite the same way.

Setting: 2006-2009, Guangzhou 广州市; Huilong Village 黑龙镇, Sichuan Province 四川省 (2100 km northwest of Guangzhou).

63

**Let the Bullets Fly** 让子弹飞 *Ranzi dan fei*

Jiang Wen 姜文, 2010. 132 min.

Stars Ge You, Chow Yun Fat. Jiang Wen

This incredible comedy with China’s most electric male actors is like watching a master chess game in fast forward. Set in Sichuan during the 20s, the entourage of a conman posing as the newly arriving governor of Goosetown is set upon by bandits. In exchange for his life, the

conman offers to assist the bandit chief in assuming the role of governor, even offering his own wife to play the role of the governor's wife. But when the party arrives in Goosetown, they find themselves enmeshed in a power struggle with the local warlord. A three-way battle of wits and bullets ensues. Although deeply Chinese in its use of idioms and clever maneuvers, so rich in wit and action is this film that that will scarcely matter to Western viewers. The film is based on the novel *Ten Memories of Ye Tan* by the Sichuanese writer Ma Shitu.

Setting: 1920s, Sichuan Province 四川省.

- 64 **Letter from an Unknown Woman** 一个陌生女人的来信 *Yige mosheng nuren de lai xin*  
Xu Jinglei (女), 2004. Adapted from Stefan Zweig's 1922 novella "Letter from an unknown woman". 89min.  
This is a beautiful first class film, with much the same poetic and meditative memory mood of *Fleeing by Night*. Story begins in 1948 Beijing when a man receives a letter from woman in which she tells him of her continuing love for him over the past 18 years, her difficulties raising their child alone (whose existence he did not know of), and the pain of his not recognizing her at all when they re-encountered one another and made love again eight years after the son was born. In the letter she tells him that the son has died and she now has nothing left to live for.  
Setting: 1930, 1949, Beijing 北京
- 65 **Life on a String** 边走边唱 *Bian zou bian chang*  
Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, 1991.  
A blind monk, promised as a child 60 years ago by his dying master that when the 1000<sup>th</sup> string of his 3-stringed lute (*sanxian* 三弦) breaks, he would gain his vision and wisdom, wanders villages in [inner Mongolia] with his own blind apprentice. With sparse dialogue and a very slow pace, this philosophical fable about age, youth, sainthood, blind faith, and, perhaps, the path to enlightenment, is meditative and visually captivating. Based on the novella *Like a Banjo String* by Shi Tiesheng,  
Setting: Inner Mongolia; place and time are deliberately indeterminate.
- 66 **Little Red Flowers** 看上去很美 *Kàn shàng qù hén měi*  
Zhang Yuan 张元, 2006.  
At a kindergarten boarding school for children of Party cadres, good behavior and conformity wins "little red flowers". A four-year old boy's recalcitrance disrupts the equanimity of the staff and promotes a minor riot. Performances by the very young actors strain belief in this charming, poetic, and painful but ultimately two-dimensional struggle between authoritarian control and resistance to it in the early days of socialist education in New China. Based on a semi-autobiographical novel by Wang Shuo, one of China's irreverent modern writers.  
Setting: 1950s, Beijing 北京
- 67 **Liu Tianhua** 刘天华, 著名二胡艺术家 *Liú Tiānhuá, zhù míng èrhú yìshùjiā*  
Nanjing Film Studio, 2000. 100 min.  
This "love of country" film (*ai guo dianying*) is a straight-forward, loving biography of Liu Tianhua, China's most important 20th century composer / conductor (1895-1932), remembered for his contributions to invigorating and raising the level of Chinese classical music based on indigenous folk melodies and instruments (particularly the *erhu* 二胡 and *pipa* 琵琶) in a time and cultural environment that favored Western classical music and orchestration.  
Setting: 1920 – 30s. Beijing 北京; Nanjing 南京.
- 68 **Love Eterne** 梁山伯与祝英台 *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai*  
Li Hanxiang 李翰祥, Hong Kong, 1963. 122 min.  
Stars Ivy Ling Po, Betty Loh Ti  
This 黄梅戏 *huangmeixi* opera film tells the well-known Tang Dynasty tragedy of the Butterfly

Lovers: Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai. Fifteen-year old Yingtai has a quick mind and a passion for learning – but can only continue her education by disguising herself as a male student. When Yingtai meets Shanbo, they find themselves soul-mates and become sworn brothers. Over the next three years, their feelings for each other deepen, and are complicated by Yingtai's disguise. This film is particularly notable because Shanbo, the male lead, is played by a wildly popular actress often cast in men's roles– thus adding yet another layer to the plays on gender. This tragic love story has captivated Chinese audiences for centuries and inspired innumerable operas, musical compositions, poems, and paintings. Several other film versions were produced in the 30s, 50s, and 60s. *Huangmei* (yellow plum) is a folk opera form from Hubei/Anhui area.

Setting: Jin Dynasty-晋朝 (265–420), Zhejiang Province 浙江省, Hangzhou 杭州 area.

69 **Lust, Caution** 色戒 *Se, jie*

Li Ang 李安 (Ang Lee), Taiwan, 2007. 157 min.

Stars Tony Leung Chiu Wai, Joan Chen

A group of politically passionate Lingnan 岭南 University drama students in Hong Kong plot to assassinate a high-ranking collaborator with the Japanese occupation government in Shanghai by using one of their group, an attractive young woman, to lure him into a trap by posing as a seductive married woman. Based on the novella by Eileen Chang, this lengthy movie is filled with lots of twist and turns in the plot, punctuated by steamy and sometimes brutal sadomasochistic sex.

Setting: 1938, Hong Kong 香港. 1942, Shanghai 上海

70 **Mapletree Village** 枫树湾 *Fengshu wan*

Lu Jue, Liu Xin, Lin Lan, 1976. 120 min. B&W.

For decades the poor people of Mapletree Village have been yearning for someone to help them rise up against their cruel landlord. The narrative opens in the late 20s, as farmers and workers are joining the Northern Expedition under the aegis of the Communists before Chiang purged the CCP from United Front. A young man returns to the village after attending the Peasant Movement Training Institute in Guangdong. Confrontations ensue in which the devious landlord with foreign connections and his son, who has joined the Guomintang troops, try to outwit the villagers while the farmer soldiers forge their weapons from scrap-iron to the accompaniment of revolutionary songs. Made right at the end of the Cultural Revolution and using actual PLA troops, this genuine patriotic movie 爱国电影 *aiguo dianying* displays all the prescribed canons of socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism in lighting and composition as well as in the representation of good and bad characters. This is a gem of a film that situates the narrative and peripheral figures within an accurate historical context.

Setting: 1926-27, Northern Expedition 北伐时期, Hunan Province 湖南省.

71 **McDull: Kung Fu Kindergarten** (one of an animation series)

Alice Mak (女) 麦家碧 (Mandarin *Mai Jiabi*) and Brian Tse 谢立文 (Mandarin *Xie Liwen*), Hong Kong, 2009. 80 min.

McDull is an overweight male pig-child with a black birthmark ringing his right eye. The 18<sup>th</sup> descendent of an ancient but insignificant philosopher/inventor, he is slow thinking but good hearted, full of dreams, and never gives up. The back story is that his mother, Ms Mak, named him McDull because just as she was about to give birth to him a magical plastic basin (pronounced “dull” in Cantonese) flew over her head; she interpreted this as a message from the gods. (McDull is an Anglicized version of his Cantonese name Mak Dull.) When McDull was still a baby, Ms Mak participated in an experiment to test the Mozart Effect -- but unfortunately, McDull was placed in the control group, which was subjected to 'nonsense songs'. Ms Mak sends McDull away to a martial arts school, where he ends up representing the school in an international competition. Very silly, but witty and very topical; extremely popular among young adults in China.

Setting: Contemporary Hong Kong 香港 and fantasy spaces.

- 72 **The Mission** 枪火- *Qiang huo*  
 Johnny To 杜琪峰 (Mandarin *Du Qifeng*), Hong Kong, 1999. 81min.  
 Five bodyguards are hired to protect a triad boss who is the target of assassination by an unknown assailant. To carry out their mission they accompany the Boss wherever he goes. To be effective, they must act as a unit, and so they build a mutual loyalty resembling the traditional brotherhood (*xiongdì qíng* 兄弟情) of martial arts (*wúxiá* 武侠) tradition. Inevitably the Boss comes under fire and they protect him. But eventually they confront a situation in which loyalty to the boss conflicts with the loyalty of ‘the brotherhood’. The clever resolution is so quick it may be missed by an unsuspecting audience, and we are left to absorb the ways in which ‘brotherhood’ loyalties, in the end, led to a win-win resolution. The cinematography soars to a level of visual elegance completely independent of its crass subject matter. The color is low key – and in long shots the five often appear as black silhouettes, each focused on a different point –as in Giacometti sculptures. Extreme close-ups that would cause viewers to empathize are absent. The soundtrack is effective and elegant.  
 Setting: 90s, Hong Kong 香港.
- 73 **Mountain Patrol** 可可西里 *Kekexili*  
 Lu Chuan, 2004. 89 min.  
 Between 1985 and 1993, poachers seeking to get rich from selling pelts reduced the antelope population of the Tibetan plateau from 100,000 to about 10,000. In 1993, without official approval, a group of civilian men formed a volunteer patrol to rout the poachers and allow the antelope population to recover. Following the poachers’ murder of the patrol leader and the ensuing publicity (including Peng Hui’s carefully made 2000 documentary film *Balance*) in 1995 the Chinese government declared Kekexili (Ho Xil region) a national nature reserve. Some of the poachers were caught and jailed; in late 2011, six others who had eluded the law turned themselves in to the police. Inspired by Peng Hui’s documentary, and using local nonprofessionals as lead actors, this realistically shot, semi-fictionalized narrative unfolds over three weeks in 1996 as a Beijing journalist determined to uncover the truth joins the vigilantes as they track and confront poachers in the harsh and unforgiving Tibetan landscape. The film explores the battle between conservation and livelihood in a harsh region of China and is absolutely gripping and graphic from start to finish.  
 Setting: 1996, Tibetan plateau 青藏高原.
- 74 **Mulan** 花木兰 *Hua Mulan*  
 Ma Jingle 马楚成, 2009. 114 min.  
 Stars Zhao Wei  
 In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Wei and other northern kingdoms were under attack by the nomadic Mongolians who wanted their iron resources and winter grazing lands. In this latest retelling of the legend of Hua Mulan, the filial daughter disguises herself as a man so she can go to battle in place of her aging and ailing father and ends up spending 12 years as a soldier who becomes distinguished in battle, rises in the ranks to become a respected general lauded by the King, and finally retires to her home village where she once again assumes her female identity. Variable versions of the legend date back to the 6-8<sup>th</sup> centuries; and since 1927 at least 9 major Chinese films/TV productions (not counting Disney, of course) have been popular. This version and its high production values were clearly designed for a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience -- whereas the purity of the original Mulan’s invulnerable filial piety made her a triumphant paragon, this Mulan caves in to a love interest for whom she endangers the lives of her men, their kingdom, and her self-respect as she struggles emotionally to become battle-hardened and to come to a mature comprehension of the true nature of leadership, patriotism, and sacrifice.  
 Setting: 450 CE, Northern Wei Kingdom 北魏朝 (385-534), northern China.
- 75 **Not One Less** 一个都不能少 *Yi ge duo bu neng shao*  
 Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1999. 106min.

Based on a true situation, and with non-actors portraying themselves, the narrative tells the story of a 13-year old country girl assigned to be a substitute teacher for one month in a primary school in a very poor neighboring village. For this she will earn a bonus when the regular teacher returns – but only if every single student (and not one less) is still in school. The main focus of the movie is the girl's tireless efforts to track down and bring back one particularly recalcitrant pupil, an 11-year old boy who has run away to the city to earn money to pay off a debt owed by his ailing widowed mother. The real life of the village is powerfully juxtaposed with the sanitized versions of reality routinely delivered by the city's TV station and its personnel. But paradoxically –only when her cause is channeled through the artificialized language of this mass venue are she, the school, and the village empowered to emerge victorious in the contemporary world. A truthful and moving portrayal of rural poverty, the conditions for rural educators, and the difficulty of implementing a national goal of nine year compulsory education in the face of increasing numbers of students leaving schools to pursue jobs in the booming urban centers.

Setting: 90s, Zhenningbao Village 镇宁堡, Chicheng County - 赤城县, Hebei Province 河北省, near Jiangjiakou City 张家口.

76 **On the Beat** 民警故事 *Minjing gushi*

Ning Ying 宁瀛 (女), 1995. 102min.

Real policemen act the parts of this cinema verite of bike-riding Beijing cops' daily lives, much of which is seen through the eyes of a new officer being introduced to his beat by an older one. Regular patriotic indoctrination meetings, meetings with a neighborhood committee (seven 'grannies' who call themselves the Seven Swans), chasing a rabid dog, confiscating pet dogs from people who haven't followed the regulations, and interrogating a drunk, s gambling card-trickster, a man selling posters of women in bathing suits (illegal), a dog owner with an attitude, etc., -- the situations faced by the officers are petty and the deadpan seriousness with which they pursue them creates a comedic effect. Through the eyes of a camera that pretends to be simply recording, we observe the increasing commercialization of society, the inexorable progression of destruction / construction, the incidental responses to ubiquitous TV (much of it American).

Setting: 1994, Beijing 北京.

77 **Once Upon a Time in China and America** 黄飞鸿之西域雄狮 *Huang Feihong zhi xiyu xiong shi*

Sammo Hung 洪金宝 (Mandarin *Huang Jinbao*), Hong Kong, 1997, 102 min.

Stars Jet Li, Rosamund Kwan.

In this often silly and bizarre parody of American western films, the legendary Chinese physician-hero, Huang Feihong's *gongfu* skill is pitted against American gun slingers in the context of vicious anti-Chinese feelings in 19<sup>th</sup> century California. As an oppressed foreigner in the US, Huang finds fellowship with the similarly oppressed Native Americans who save him from an ambush, and with an open minded American cowboy. Although not considered the best of the *Once Upon a Time in China* series, the movie is particularly interesting and entertaining for its portrayal of Americans and Native Americans through a Chinese lens. The recent DVD includes a special feature on the making of the film.

Setting: late 19<sup>th</sup> century, American West (filmed in Texas).

78 **One and Eight** 一个和八个 *Yige he bage*

Zhang Junzhao 张军钊, 1984, 86min. Cinematography Zhang Yimou.

Eight prisoners are being transferred by the Communists' Eighth Route Army to a location where they will be put on trial. In addition to an Eighth Route political instructor who has been framed, the prisoner group consists of 3 bandits (who at one point compare themselves to the outlaws of Liangshan Marsh), 3 army deserters, a collaborator with the Japanese, and a landlord. The prisoners become a burden to their captors and are about to be executed when fighting breaks out with the Japanese and the prisoners volunteer to fight with the Army. Only a few manage to escape. The film is a collaborative work by the 1982 graduates of Beijing Film Academy, the first graduating class after the hiatus of the Cultural Revolution, and is

considered a seminal Fifth Generation film for its antithesis to the Cultural Revolution films populated by “model” leftists; *One and Eight*, on the contrary, shows that even bandits and immoral elements can be heroic individuals. Based on an epic poem by Guo Xiaochuan.  
Setting: Between 1937 and 1945, War of Resistance Against Japan, First United Front 国共合作.

79 **Opium War** 鸦片战争 *Yapian zhanzheng*

Xie Jin 谢晋, 1996. @153min.

Long and sometimes tedious historical epic of the Opium War (1839-42) from the Chinese point of view. Centerpiece of the narrative is national hero and symbol of China's resistance to Western imperialism: Commissioner Lin Zexu 林则徐 (1785-1850), is sent by the Daoguang Emperor 道光帝 to Guangzhou to stop the opium trade, which had been instigated by the British in an effort to rebalance their silver payments and which was enabled by corrupt Chinese customs officials. Lin flushes out the corrupt officials, blockades the British on Shamian Island 沙面岛, and confiscates more than 2.5 million pounds of opium from the ships in the harbor, which he then orders mixed with salt and lime and (after asking forgiveness from the sea spirits) dumped into the sea. In the meantime, the British have connived to declare their merchants' property the property of the Queen (Victoria), thereby rendering its confiscation grounds for war. Released on the eve of the 1997 Return of Hong Kong, the film created a furor among the British in Hong Kong and apparently has not been released in the U.S. despite the fact that numerous Western historians find the film's treatment of the subject relatively impartial and accurate.

Setting: 1839-42, Guangzhou -廣州 and London.

80 **The Peacock** 孔雀 *Kongque*

Gu Changwei 顾长卫, 2005. 142 min.

Directed by one of China's most highly regarded cinematographers, this exquisitely filmed movie, set in a small town between 1977-1984, is divided into three separate narratives, each told from the perspective of one of three siblings emerging into adulthood who live sad, commonplace lives. The eldest son is obese and mentally damaged, an outcast who remains pure and innocent. The middle child, a daughter, is energetic and persistent in pursuing her goals, yet constantly meets failure. The youngest, shy, quiet, and extremely sensitive, is deeply ashamed of his older brother and finally breaks away from the family. Each change of narrator, like the movement of a kaleidoscope, shifts our perceptions of the reality of the family relationships. The pace of the cinematography is slow and meditative, the colors muted, the shots often long and unedited, the background music rich, the narrative self-revealing – neither dull nor melodramatic. Like many of his contemporaries, the director used non-professional actors to complete the sense of realism on screen.

Setting: 1977-84, rural China: Shuiye township 水冶镇, Anyang County 安阳县, Henan Province-河南省.

81 **Peking Opera Blues** 刀马旦 *Dao Ma Dan*

Tsui Hark 徐克 (Mandarin *Xu Ke*), Hong Kong, 1986.

Stars Brigitte Lin

The daughter of a northern warlord in Beijing must hide her identity as a revolutionary from her father, who is acting as an intermediary in President Yuan Shikai's efforts to raise money from foreign bankers to support his conspiracy against Sun Yat Sen's democratic Nationalist Party (Guomindang 国民党) headquartered in the south. Along with a male colleague, the daughter is assigned to steal the contracts for the foreign loan from her father's safe, but their mission becomes complicated by entanglements with a mercenary sing-song girl bent on recovering jewelry she has stolen, the daughter of the owner of a Beijing Opera house whose ambition to become an opera singer is thwarted by laws against women appearing on stage, and a disaffected soldier. The five join forces to steal the key documents. A very fast-moving Hong Kong action film, lavish in its use of color and costuming, and complete with a characteristic Hong Kong sense of the ridiculous and comedic. The operatic setting facilitates

explorations of gender roles in Chinese society which is a common theme in Tsui's work; many reviewers consider this entertaining comedy-adventure to be one of Tsui Hark's masterpieces. *Peking Opera Blues* and *Shanghai Blues* are two films in an unfinished trilogy.

Setting: 1913, Beijing 北京.

82 **PK.COM.CN** 谁说青春不能错 *Yingxiong qingchun bu neng cuo*

Xiao Jiang 小江 (女), 2008. 105 min.

Stars Jaycee Chan (Jackie Chan's son)

You've *never* seen a Chinese film quite like this one! One of China's few women directors brings us an energetic, surreal, non-linear coming of age narrative interspersed with montages and animation sequences. A young surgeon and erstwhile amateur artist is dominated by his relentless surgeon mother, his cleanliness-obsessed nurse dad, and a fiancé who monitors his every move with a GPS phone. He escapes into a mix of imagination and memories of his days in medical school, and especially of his free-spirited college roommate and their old girlfriend. An imminent college reunion promises to afford the three companions the chance to meet again. However, the outcome is completely unexpected. The film's title references the online gaming world and the blurring of that world and reality; the overall themes are familiar ones in Sixth Generation films: urban ennui and loneliness, negotiating relationships in the modern age, yearning for self-fulfillment, and anxieties about an uncertain future. This movie can be seen as prescient as stories of internet addiction camps, deaths from exhaustion at internet cafes and the increasing retreat from reality into the online world by China's youth seem to be on the rise. Although based on a popular audience-determined internet novel designed for the 'wired' generation, older audiences have found this a highly original and immensely enjoyable film.

Setting: Mid 00s with flashbacks to mid 90s

83 **Please Vote for Me** 请为我投票 *Qing wei wo toupiao*

Chen Weijun, 2007.

In 2005 or 06, teachers at Evergreen 常青 Elementary School in Wuhan (Hubei Province) selected three eight-year old 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students as candidates for an experiment in "democracy". Ostensibly for the first time in China, students would vote for their class monitor (normally appointed by the teachers) and the candidates would conduct campaigns and debates before the election. One candidate (a boy) is an authoritarian-style incumbent from the previous year. Another (a boy) is a natural schemer and manipulator. The third is a girl who seems overwhelmed. The parents step in to play fervent roles in coaching and managing the campaigns – with results that are painful to watch. Whether the film is really about "democracy" is debatable. It is at least as much about the nature of third graders' social development and the desperate ambitions of parents to gain advantage and status for their only child. And although the director is a Wuhan native, the film has an unfortunate orientalist edge, reinforcing the idea that Chinese are not quite mature enough for true "democracy". This is a film certain to generate a good deal of worthwhile discussion. Information about arranging free community showings and discussion materials can be accessed at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/pleasevoteforme/>.

Setting: 2005 or 06, Wuhan 武汉, Hubei Province 湖北省.

84 **Princess Iron Fan** 铁扇公主 *Tieshan gongzhu*

He Menghua 何梦华, Hong Kong, 1966. 93 min.

Stars Cheng Peipei.

Second in a series of Shaw Brothers' episodes from *Journey to the West* 西游记, a mythologized narrative based on an actual quest in which a Tang Dynasty Buddhist monk traveled to India to bring back sacred texts. Accompanying the monk are Sandy (a disciple), Pigsy (a man with the snout and ears of a pig), and the Monkey King, aka Sun Wukong 孙悟空 -- perhaps the best known and best beloved character in centuries of Chinese popular culture, endowed with magical powers as well as a contrary and clever nature. This depicts two separate episodes: the first involving Princess Iron Fan and the Ox Demon King – the second

involves the White Boned Demon 白骨精 – a name later given to Chairman Mao’s wife Jiang Qing, leader of the Gang of Four in the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). A classic of theatrical silliness, clever strategies, and “camp” effects.

Setting: Tang Dynasty 唐朝 (618-907) in fantasized western provinces.

85 **Puppetmaster** 戏梦人生 *Xi meng rensheng*

Hou Hsiao Hsien 侯孝贤, Taiwan, 1993. 142min.

Li Tien-lu (1909 - 1998), Taiwan’s most famous puppeteer, narrates his life from childhood to 1945 when Japan’s fifty-year occupation of Taiwan ended, while an acting troupe acts it out, interleaving their theatrical interpretations with the real events, and embedding political conditions within personal lived experience. Under the Japanese occupation, Li was required to participate in the government’s propagandizing “Japanization movement”. As a director, Hou is noted for long unedited shots, minimal camera movement, and understated sounds, all of which coerce the viewer into experiencing (rather than simply observing) narrative moments in real time. Lush cinematography, repetitive devices, and personal anecdotes lighten the subject matter of being a second class citizen in one’s own country under colonization. This is the second of Hou’s ‘family album’ trilogy on modern Taiwan history.

Setting: 1909-1945, Japanese occupied Taiwan 台湾日治时期.

86 **Purple Butterfly** 紫蝴蝶 *Zi hudie*

Luo Ye, 2003. 127 min. Stars Zhang Ziyi

In 1928 in Manchuria, a young Chinese college student is in love with her Japanese classmate, who returns to Japan. She is traumatized by witnessing the murder of her brother, an activist in the anti-Japanese movement during the Japanese invasion and occupation of Manchuria. The film skips forward to Shanghai, 1931, to another pair of innocent young lovers: a telephone operator and her Japanese boyfriend, whose affair is backgrounded by streets filled with vigorous anti-Japanese protests. One day as the boyfriend is leaving the train, he accidentally retrieves the wrong suit jacket, which bears a purple butterfly pin -- a secret code identifying him to a band of waiting resisters as the assassin they are expecting. Shooting breaks out and a series of mistaken identities leads to tragedy and revenge. A beautiful epic film with a masterful performance by Zhang Ziyi, *Purple Butterfly* has a dense and convoluted plot that may be confusing to first time viewers.

Setting: 1928, Manchuria. 1930s, Shanghai 上海, during Japanese invasions and occupation.

87 **Qiu Jin, A Revolutionary** 秋瑾 *Qiu Jin*

Xie Jin 谢晋, 1983. 110 min.

Well known in China as a revolutionary martyr and model of courage for Chinese women to involve themselves in political struggles, Qiu Jin (1875-1907) was born in Xiamen 厦门 (Fujian), the educated daughter of a progressive middle-class family who did not bind her feet, and she was married into the family of a minor Qing dynasty official. Caught up in the patriotic fervor to overthrow the Qing and establish a republic, Qiu Jin deserted her husband and two young children to join Chinese student revolutionaries in Japan, where she studied archery, fencing, and martial arts, and often dressed in men’s clothing. Upon returning to China she championed women’s causes, founded a women’s newspaper, campaigned for women’s education, and crusaded against foot-binding. Qiu Jin was executed for treason in 1907 after she collaborated in failed uprising against the local Qing government in which she secretly involved the students and resources of the school to which she had been appointed principal. Qiu Jin was an accomplished poet and calligrapher, and upon her arrest, when given a brush with which to write her confession, she instead wrote a defiant 8-character poem. Director Xie Jin is one of China’s most famous Fourth Generation directors, well known for his historical biopics. Qiu Jin’s life is also the subject of a more recent film *The Woman Knight of Mirror Lake* (Herman Lau, Hong Kong, 2011).

Setting: 1903?? – 1907, Hangzhou-杭州; Japan-日本, Shanghai-上海市; Shaoxing-绍兴市, Zhejiang Province-浙江省.

- 88 **Raise the Red Lantern** 大红灯笼高高挂 *Dahong denglong gaogaogua*  
Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1991. 125min.  
Stars Gong Li.  
Songlian, a college student sold against her will by her mother to a wealthy man, becomes his fourth wife, and gets caught up in domestic competition and rivalry. First Mistress, mother of a grown son, is the alpha wife. Plain and pleasant Second Mistress has a “Buddha’s face”. Jealous Third Mistress is a former opera singer, trying to hold on to her beauty. Songlian’s arrival, and the initial favor paid her by the Master (signaled to all by a red lantern placed outside her quarters for the night) upsets the tenuous balance among the other three, ultimately forcing Songlian to participate in the intrigues of the system, to witness another’s ultimate punishment, and ultimately to go mad. Based on the Su Tong novel *Wives and Concubines*, this quintessential Fifth Generation film locates its social critique in the feudal oppression of women.  
Setting: 1920s, Qiao’s Compound, 乔家大院 near the ancient city of Pingyao 平遥县, Shanxi Province-山西省.
- 89 **Red Detachment of Women** 红色娘子军 *Hongse niangzi jun*  
Xie Jin 谢晋, 1961. 120 min.  
Modern revolutionary classic (story was also one of the Cultural Revolution’s Eight Model Works) by one of China’s most popular and durable directors. In 1930-31 on Hainan Island in southernmost China: a Communist army officer disguised as a businessman to infiltrate the local warlord’s arms smuggling ring, helps a slave girl to escape her feudal, villainous master and join the Red Army, where she wreaks vengeance on the warlord and his toadies while liberating the local village with her comrades. Directed by Xie Jin, a Fourth Generation master of patriotic films.  
Setting: 1930-31, Hainan Island 海南 (southern China)
- 90 **Red Cliff 1 & 2** 赤壁上与赤壁下 *Chibi shang yu Chibe xia*,  
John Woo 吴宇森 (Mandarin *Wu Yusen*), 2008, 2009. 140 + 148 = 288 min. (International Edition)  
Based on Chapters 43-50 of the classic novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the legendary Battle of Red Cliffs therein, which are known to virtually every Chinese person. The Han King, with his Viceroy Cao Cao seeks to unite China by conquering the states of Wu (ruled by the young, untested, and hesitant Sun Quan) and Xu (ruled by Liu Bei, a compassionate warlord). The latter two form an alliance guided by war strategist Zhou Yu. The conflict climaxes in the Battle of Red Cliffs in which clever strategies accompanied by Heavenly cooperation enable a small army with relatively few resources to triumph over a vastly larger and better armed adversary. Familiar Woo themes of *yi* 义 are here -- blood brotherhood, modesty, loyalty -- but not as integrated as in his earlier Hong Kong gangster films. Certain non-military scenes appear to be included for metaphorical or allusionary meanings that are not always clear. Lots of non-stop quick-cutting epic battle scenes with endless casualties, blood spurts, and falling horses prevail in Part I. Part II has greater character development and more of the clever legendary military strategies that have made their way into everyday Chinese idiomatic phrases.  
Setting: 208CE., last days of Han Dynasty 汉朝末年; the exact location of the battle is a subject of debate, but is generally thought to be the south bank of the Yangtze River 长江, southwest of present-day Wuhan 武汉 and northeast of Baqiu (present-day Yueyang 岳阳市, Hunan Province 湖南省).
- 91 **Red Elephant** 红象 *Hong xiang*  
Zhang Jianya 张建亚, Xie Xiaojing, Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮, 1982. 75min. Sound: Jia Zhangke.  
Two schoolboys on vacation, take off together on a mission to find the subject of a local folk tale -- a flying red elephant. Their journey is punctuated by predictable forest adventures: encounters with snakes, wild cats, quicksand, etc., together with personal conflicts, rivalries, and reconciliations. When they rescue a baby elephant, its mother recognizes her debt and invites the children to ride on her. A slow paced and charming very early Fifth Generation film

with children as the target audience.

Setting: Southwestern China, near the Myanmar (Burma) border, among the Dai minority 傣族.

92 **Red Sorghum** 红高粱 *Hong gaoliang*

Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1988. 91 min.

Stars Gong Li, Jiang Wen

Based on Mo Yan's novel of the same name, the film opens with a man's voice narrating the life of his grandmother. Jiu'er, a young woman whose auspicious masculine name means "double nine" for the day of her birth (9<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month), is being carried in a wedding sedan to her arranged marriage with an aging leper who owns a distillery. As the wedding party travels through a sorghum field, it is attacked by bandits who are chased off by one of the sedan carriers, who later makes love to Jiu'er in the field when she is returning from her post-nuptial visit to her parents. Jiu'er's husband mysteriously dies and she takes charge of the distillery. After a series of misadventures, the irreverent sedan carrier shows up, takes up residence, and urinates in the liquor vats, which fortuitously improves the taste. The narrator's father is born. The Japanese invade, conscript the inhabitants as laborers, and commit numerous atrocities, during which one of the distillery workers is skinned alive. In order to avenge his death, the distillery workers plan a disastrous ambush using the liquor as a firebomb. This is Zhang Yimou's first film as a director, and foretells his dramatic use of color.

Setting: 1930s, rural Shandong Province 山东省 during Japanese invasions.

93 **Reincarnation of Golden Lotus** 潘金莲之前世今生 *Pan Jinlian zhi qianshi jinsheng*

Clara Law 罗卓瑶 (Mandarin *Luo Zhuoyao*), Hong Kong, 1989. 99 min.

In the prelude a woman carries her severed head into the afterlife where the judge instructs her to drink three cups of the Tea of Forgetfulness. But bent on revenge, she refuses the third cup. In 1968 during the Cultural Revolution, a beautiful young ballet student is raped by the school principal, falsely accused of being a slut, and dismissed. She marries a wealthy Hong Kong businessman -- but is overcome by episodes of strange, uncontrollable feelings and vivid dreams of being abused and murdered in ancient China. Her husband's chauffeur, whom he says is "just like my brother", turns out to be someone she loved in China. One night after wandering into a disco she has sex with a man who turns out to be a Machiavellian designer/photographer renting property from her husband. After accidentally finding a manuscript of the Ming Dynasty erotic novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 she realizes that she is the reincarnation of the novel's main character, and that three men from that ancient past have reappeared in her present life. Because the present day story is driven by forces from the past, it's important to learn the story of Lotus, her husband, her scheming lover, and her brother-in-law (a few chapters in *Outlaws of the Marsh* 水滸傳 that are fleshed out, so to speak, in *Jin Ping Mei*). This is a haunting film, a well-made example of the *liaozhai* 聊斋 genre of Chinese ghost stories in which the supernatural is continuous with the natural with no need to invent special monsters.

Setting: c. 1968, China; c. 1988, Hong Kong 香港

94 **Rickshaw Boy** 骆驼祥子 *Luotou Xiangzi*

Ling Zifeng 凌子风, 1982. 113 min.

This tragi-comic drama is set in Beijing in the 1920s where a simple rickshaw puller from the countryside wants only to make enough money to buy his own rickshaw, but his desires are constantly thwarted by the social conditions and military instability of the time. Just when Xiangzi has saved enough to buy his own new rickshaw, a local warlord conscripts him to transport ammunition to a chaotic battle where the new rickshaw is stolen. After returning to Beijing to make a fresh start, his savings are unjustly confiscated and he is tricked into marriage by a short-sighted and self-centered woman. The film portrays the dehumanizing labor, loss of personal dignity, and lonely isolation faced daily by many common people as they eked out meager livings amidst the overpopulated and cruel urban sprawl of Beijing.

Based on the well-known 1936 novel of the same name (aka *Camel Xiangzi*) by Lao She, one of China's most famous 20<sup>th</sup> century writers. This Third Generation film is ostensibly the first from the mainland to officially open in the U.S. after the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949.

Setting: 1920s, Beijing 北京 and surrounding northern countryside.

95 **Road Home** 我的父亲母亲 *Wode fuqin muqin*

Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1999. 89 min.

Stars Zhang Ziyi (debut role)

After years of absence from home, a businessman receives news of his father's death and returns to his home village to assist his grief-stricken mother with a traditional funeral. As he reflects, the son narrates his parents' love story, which has become a village legend. His father was a teacher who arrived in the village in the late 50s, and he and a young woman fall hard for each other. However, during the Anti-Rightist Campaign 反右派运动, the teacher was recalled by the government, and the broken-hearted young woman became deathly ill. The teacher was able to return after a few years, and they were married. Despite various difficulties, the mother succeeds in weaving the shroud and the ritual funeral procession she is so insistent on carrying out is arranged. Before returning to the city, the son teaches a class in his father's old schoolhouse. This was a huge hit in China and viewers were given packages of Kleenex as they entered the theatre. The film is based on the novel *Remembrance* by Bao Shi.

Setting: Late 50s, 60s & late 90s, rural northern China.

96 **Roots and Branches** 我的兄弟姐妹 *Wode xiongdi jiemei*

Yu Zhong 俞钟 (女), 2001. 95 min.

Stars Cui Jian ('Father of Chinese Rock') as the father,

The film alternates between present-time in Beijing and flashbacks to the Cultural Revolution when the parents and their four children were relocated to a remote village undergo 're-education'. When the parents died in a snowstorm, the eldest brother worked tirelessly to find adoptive parents for each of his younger siblings, and he gave each of them a snapshot of the whole family so that they would be able to find each other in the future. The eldest daughter was adopted into a family that emigrated to the U.S., where she was educated and eventually became a famous orchestra conductor. When she is invited to conduct a concert in China, she decides to use this opportunity to search for her siblings and reunite them. Prominent among the deeply Chinese characteristics of this film is the pre-eminent value of family and the selfless (and Confucian) responsibility of older siblings for younger ones – a responsibility that overrides personal desires. The theme of family separation and reunion has a long history in Chinese melodrama, and every Chinese citizen alive today has had some experience with family separations. Another film for which movie-goers were handed packs of Kleenex as they came to see the show.

Setting: Early 70s, Cultural Revolution 文化大革命; 90s, Beijing 北京.

97 **Rouge** 胭脂扣 *Yanzhi kou*

Stanley Kwan 关锦鹏 (Mandarin *Guan Jinpeng*), Hong Kong, 1987. 92min.

Stars Leslie Cheung. Anita Mui.

Eschewing special effects of any kind, this is a refined and gentle ghost story about two doomed lovers in early 1930's Hong Kong. She is a famous courtesan. He is an upper-class playboy heir to a chain of successful medicine stores, whose parents are horrified by the affair. Deciding to end it with a suicide pact, the lovers make a suicide pact, vowing to meet up in the afterworld where they can be together forever. But he never showed up in the afterlife, and fifty-three years later her ghost returns to search for him in the world of the living, which has changed quite a lot since she left. She decides to put a classified advertisement in a newspaper, which draws the editor and his girlfriend into the search for the missing lover. The film's nostalgia for the past has a special significance as it was produced in the period before the impending handover of Hong Kong to China, a time in which many Hong Kong citizens

viewed the future with trepidation and the past with rouge colored spectacles. Both lead actors, Leung and Mui, died in 2003, which gives this award-winning film a special poignancy for their fans. The story is from a novel by Lillian Lee.

Setting: 1934 and 1987, Hong Kong 香港.

98 **Shanghai Triad** 摇啊摇，摇到外婆桥 *Yao a yao, yao dao waipo qiao*),

Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1995. 109 min.

Stars Gong Li.

Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Shanghai has symbolized the conflict between traditional Chinese values and westernizing corruption. In this film, set in 1920s Shanghai, issues of true and false values and their consequences are tragically played out through the character of Bijou, the mistress of a Triad boss, and observed from the point-of-view of her innocent 13-year old serving boy. After a vicious attack by a rival gang, the boss smuggles himself and his inner circle to an island hideout, where Bijou is brought back in touch with her rural roots, but unable to extricate herself from the boss's hold. This was the last film collaboration between Zhang Yimou and Gong Li until 2006 and marked the end of their personal relationship as well.

Setting: 1920s, Shanghai 上海.

99 **Shaolin Temple** 少林寺 *Shaolin si*

Zhang Xinyan 张鑫炎, 1982.

Stars Jet Li (his first film)

Sixteen-year old Jet Li, a martial arts prodigy, stars in the first Hong Kong-mainland co-production made after the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, with the other monks played not by actors but by actual *gongfu* athletes. The story is based on a legend presumed to be rooted in historical fact: in the Tang Dynasty, a boy's father is killed in battle by a despicable warlord and the son escapes to a monastery and swears to avenge his father's death. However, the Abbot will allow the boy to stay and train only if he agrees to abide by the Buddhist principles of nonviolence and abstention from meat, alcohol, and women. Needless to say, our hero and his cohorts, all red-blooded young males, transgress the rules from time to time, rationalizing that it doesn't matter if Buddha is in your heart. The martial arts action is genuine and often silly. The movie sparked a martial arts revival amongst mainland films as well as an interest in Shaolin martial arts in overseas markets. Though dated in its production values, this remains a significant and amusing film.

Setting: Tang Dynasty, 唐朝, Shaolin Temple 少林寺 (Luoyang -洛陽 area).

100 **Shower** 洗澡 *Xizao*

Zhang Yang 张扬, 1999. 92 min.

Stars Zhu Xu, Jiang Wu

A successful Shenzhen businessman must re-examine his family responsibilities when he is summoned to Beijing to visit his aging father and his cheerful and exuberant mentally retarded younger brother, who run a men's bath-house in an old Beijing neighborhood that is soon to be razed and its residents relocated. The situation becomes more complicated when the father dies and the son is left with the problem of caring for his mentally challenged younger brother, whose existence his wife knows nothing about. *Shower* gives us a glimpse of the vibrant hutong and park life once common in China's urban neighborhoods. It is one of a number of turn of the century films that address problems facing families in the new Chinese economy as working adults leave their parents to pursue careers, and massive "Dilapidated Housing Reconstruction Programs" move families out of crumbling inner-city residences and into distant high-rise apartment complexes that promise greater convenience and comfort and improved material standards of living. Nonetheless, for oldsters the dispersion deals a mortal blow to the intense and life-long social fabric of community support systems in which old friendships are not easily traded for the amenities of modern life.

Setting: c. 1998, Beijing 北京.

- 101 **Silver Hawk** 飞鹰 *Fei ying*  
 Ma Jingle 马楚成, 2004. 99 min.  
 Stars Michelle Yeoh.  
 A futuristic James-Bond type extravaganza in which the adopted daughter of a rich man maintains a secret identity as a masked crime-fighter. Teaming up with a classmate from her childhood martial arts training who has become a police chief, the two are pitted against a blue-eyed Germanic villain with two bionic arms who seeks to dominate the world by brainwashing cell-phone users. The heroine is based on a series of stories popular during the late 40s and early 50s, which inspired a number of Hong Kong movies and TV shows during the 60s and 70s. Fast-paced, plenty of action in futuristic urban settings – just plain fun!  
 Setting: the future (then understood to be about 2008).
- 102 **Soong Sisters** 宋家皇朝 *Song jia huangchao*  
 Mabel Cheung (Cheung Yuen-ting) 张婉婷 (Mandarin *Zhang Wanting*), Hong Kong, 1997. 128 min.  
 Stars Maggie Cheung, Michelle Yeoh, Vivian Wu, Jiang Wen  
 A dramatization of the lives of the Song sisters (Ailing, Qingling, and Meiling) from 1911 to 1949, framed within the circumstances of Qingling's death in Beijing in 1981. The sisters married the most important historical figures involved in the founding of the Republic of China – Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, and banker H.H. Kung – situating the Song family as a nexus of major decisions in modern Chinese history. The story begins with the childhood of the three sisters, during the fall of the Qing (China's last dynasty) and the establishment of the Republic of China following the 1911 Revolution. The girls' father, Charlie Song, was an American-educated Methodist minister who achieved wealth and prestige through banking and business, and was a sympathizer with Sun Yat-sen's democratic revolutionary movement. This is a high-value "Hollywood style" film focused on the sisters' positioning in the era's tumultuous events, and released in Hong Kong the very year of its return to China. Perhaps this accounts for some omissions and historical inaccuracies, as well as a sympathetic portrayal of the victimization of Communist supporters and the correlative vilification of Chiang Kai-shek and Soong May-ling.  
 Setting: 1911 – 1949, Shanghai, with brief sequences in 1981 in New York and Beijing 北京.
- 103 **A Soul Haunted by Painting** aka **La Peinture** 画魂 *Hua hun*  
 Huang Shuqin 黄蜀芹 (女), 1994. 91 min.  
 Stars Gong Li  
 A biography of China's most well-known 20<sup>th</sup>-century woman artist, Pan Yuliang 潘玉良 (1899 - 1977). Sold into a brothel as a child, she escapes to become the second wife of a gentle and loving customs official who supports her compulsion to draw and paint. Pan becomes a student at the Shanghai Art Academy founded by Liu Haisu, who had recently returned from studying in Europe, and whose school is frequently shut down by the police for using nude models. With Liu's sponsorship, Pan eventually studies in Paris herself, wins a scholarship and several international prizes. She returns to China in 1929 to accept an appointment at Nanjing Central University. However she encounters many ugly obstacles to her acceptance: her early association with a brothel, male chauvinist attitudes toward women artists and academics, prejudice against Western-influenced art, particularly female nudes, which formed an important segment of her work. In 1937, she returns to Paris where she lives as an ex-patriot until her death in 1977. During much of this time Pan's art was classified as 'depraved', but after Opening 开放 in the 1980s her work was finally recognized and exhibited in China and Taiwan.  
 Setting: @1914 – 1977, Shanghai 上海, Nanjing 南京, and Paris.
- 104 **Sparkling Red Star** 孩子的天空 *Haizi de tiankong*  
 Dante Lam 林超贤, Puzzle Animation Studio. 2007. 82min. (animation)  
 A contemporary re-make in animated form of a 1974 live action film by August 1 Film Studio, a division of the People's Liberation Army, which, until recently, dominated the production of all films related to Chinese military history. In this very intense story, the father of Pan

Dongzi, a 10-year old boy, is saved from the wicked village landlord by the Red Army, who remain to protect the village. Eventually, however, the Army, including Pan's father, must set off on the Long March. On the eve of his departure the father gives his son a red star badge. The evil tyrant and his gang return to the village, and Pan, his mother, and the other villagers hide out as guerilla fighters. Pan gradually becomes stronger as he experiences life without his parents. The 1974 film, made toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, has been seen by virtually every Chinese youngster; Dongzi is as well known a role model among today's millennials as Lei Feng was among their parents. Based on the 1974 novel by Li Xintian. (Because of its intensity, this film is not recommended for children under 12.)

Setting: 1937, Liuxi Village (Jiangxi Province 江西省, southeastern China) during the Red Army's Long March.

105 **Spring River Flows East** 一江春水向东流 *Yi jiang chun shui xiong dongliu*

Cai Chusheng -蔡楚生 and Zheng Junli 郑君里, 1947. 190min (Part I and II @ 95 min.each.) B&W  
Sometimes called China's *Gone With the Wind* and considered by some to be one of the greatest Chinese language films ever made, this film, set in the 1930s, follows the story of a young couple in Shanghai who are very much in love. They marry and have a son. Swept up in the chaos of the War of Resistance Against Japan, they are separated for several years, only to be later reunited under tragic circumstances. A Third Generation leftist film that is extremely critical of the Nationalist Party, this movie juxtaposes betrayal and moral corruption with suffering and sacrifice. Bring a box of Kleenex -- this is an acme of Chinese melodrama!

Setting: 1930s, Shanghai 上海, Chongqing 重庆.

106 **Still Life** 三峡好人 *Sanxia haoren*

Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯, 2006. 108min

A coal-miner from Shanxi province arrives in Fengjie on the Yangzi River looking for his daughter Missy, who was put in his wife's custody by the police after a fight 16 years earlier. In a similar situation, a woman, also from Shanxi, comes looking for her husband, a former guard at the Three Gorges Dam who hasn't been home for two years. In these parallel but non-intersecting stories each finds the person they're looking for, but there is little drama in the reunions. Sixth Generation director Jia Zhangke's unadorned, leisurely filming style is dominated by fixed camera positions and lo Adapted from *The Wan Family's Lawsuit* by Chen Yuanbin, *Qiu Ju* is a rollicking comedy for Chinese audiences that Westerners will enjoy as well. ng unedited takes that present a disinterested display of the minutiae of the lives of ordinary people and the physical conditions under which they live – in this case in the wake of the dam construction and the changing economy. At one point the miner has a vision of a tightrope walker silhouetted against the sky between two partially demolished buildings. Very powerful and haunting film in its way.

Setting: Early 2000s, Fengjie 奉节县, Sichuan Province 四川, near the site of the Three Gorges on the Yangzi River 长江三峡大坝.

107 **Story of Qiu Ju** 秋菊打官司 *Qiu Ju da guansi*

Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1992

Stars Gong Li

Seeking retribution for the insult to her husband when he is kicked in the groin by the village headman, Qiu Ju, a rural woman in the later stages of her first pregnancy, tries to extract an apology for this injustice by tirelessly petitioning endless layers of bureaucracy, from the village to the provincial capital. She must sell produce from the family farm at the market several times to raise enough money for herself and her sister-in-law to travel to the city, where they are conspicuous country bumpkins. As the case is reviewed by progressively higher levels of the legal system and adjudicated in Qiu Ju's favor, the village headman steadfastly refuses to abide by any of the judgments. When Qiu Ju goes into a difficult labor, however, the headman organizes a group of men to carry her by stretcher on foot through the snow to the hospital where she gives birth to a healthy son. At the one-month party for the baby, to Qiu Ju's great dismay, a policeman shows up and takes the headman away to serve a fifteen-day jail term for

breaking her husband's rib. A rollicking comedy for Chinese audiences, that American viewers are apt to take a bit more seriously. Adapted from *The Wan Family's Lawsuit* by Chen Yuanbin.

Setting. 1992, rural northwest Shaanxi Province 陕西省.

108 **Street Angel** 马路天使 *Malu tianshi*

Yuan Muzhi 袁牧之, 1937. B&W

Stars Zhou Xuan (China's 'Golden Throat')

This classic Third Generation leftist film owes its inspiration to an American film by the same name (dir. Frank Borzage, 1928) set in Italy. The film opens with repeated upward panning shots that silhouette against the sky the tops of modern Shanghai skyscrapers, and then, signaling its concern with the lives of the socially marginal, pans downward, downward to a level below the street, where we are introduced to two sisters, refugees from the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, who are being held as bondservants by a couple who run a barbershop/bath/restaurant establishment. The older is forced to work as a forlorn prostitute while the younger earns her keep as an irrepressibly cheerful servant and cabaret singer. Romance blossoms between the younger sister and one of four male street musicians who live a hand-to-mouth existence across the alley. When the evil master arranges the younger's marriage to a local gangster, the older 'sister' colludes in her escape, is stabbed by the angry master, and dies a tragic death. In the final shots of the film, after the older sister has died, the opening sequence is reversed and the camera pans from the level of the sewers upward into the sky.

Setting: 1930s, Shanghai 上海

109 **Suzhou River** 苏州河 *Suzhou He*

Luo Ye 娄烨, 2000. 83 min.

Stars Zhao Xun

A videographer narrates the story of his uneven romance with a bar performer who swims in a large aquarium at the Happy Tavern dressed (or undressed) as a blond mermaid. He then tells a story about a petty crook / motorcycle courier who has been hired to get a rich man's daughter out of the house when the father brings home a mistress; the two fall in love. However, the crook is involved in plot with his former girlfriend to hold the daughter for ransom. The scheme falls apart and the daughter apparently jumps to her death into the River – although her body is never found – and the crook is sentenced to prison. Years later, he returns to Shanghai looking for the daughter, and comes to believe that that she is the mermaid. This Sixth Generation realistic, brooding, urban film (no glitzy Pudong in this Shanghai!) with its ambiguous ending is reminiscent of French "New Wave" films or vague style of Hong Kong's Wong Kar-wai – or Alfred Hitchcock.

Setting: late 90s, Shanghai 上海

110 **Swordsman II** (aka Asia the Invincible) 笑傲江湖 2: 东方不败 *Xiao'ao jianghu II: Dongfang bubai*

Ching Siu-teng 程小东 (Mandarin *Cheng Xiaodong*), Hong Kong, 1992. 108 min.

Stars Jet Li, Brigitte Lin, Rosamund Kwan

Swordsman Ling and his brethren of the Wah School seek to find and restore Master Wu as head of the Sun-Moon Sect and displace the usurper Asia the Invincible, who has been increasing his martial arts powers through studying the Sacred Scroll, in the process of which he is transforming into a woman who finds Ling attractive (and gullible) and seeks to seduce him. The convoluted plot and its mind-bending silliness involves rivalries and clan feuds involving the Wah brotherhood, Master Wu's displaced followers, Asia's followers, a roving band of Japanese pirates (倭寇 *wokou*), and local officials. Based on the *wuxia*-武侠 novel *The Smiling, Proud Wanderer* by Jin Yong, among aficionados *Swordsman II* affectionately remains one of the best of the non-stop action; *jianghu* genre for its high standards of wire-work and now somewhat cheesy but still often side-splitting special effects.

Setting: 13th – 16th century CE, Ming Dynasty 大明 (1368-1644) Southeastern coast.

- 111 **Swordsman in Double Flag Town** 双旗镇刀客 *Shuang qi zhen dao ke*  
 He Ping 何平, 1991. 90 min.  
 A coming of age Chinese western, beautifully photographed, moving slowly and deliberately at first but building to suspense and intensity. The plot is easy: simple villagers in a lawless territory live in terror of roaming bandits. Haige, a quiet, almost child-like young man, arrives in Double Flag Town to claim his wife in an arranged marriage, and meets Desert Eagle, a *jianghu* 江湖 wanderer who promises to help him in the future if needed. Haige's father-in-law, an inn-keeper, and his daughter Haomei do not take to Haige at first, but he proves his skill by cleaving a carcass, and telling a story that causes Haomei to laugh uncontrollably, and thereafter she loves him. One day Haige kills a bandit who tries to rape Haomei. The villagers are terrified that this will anger the bandits and bring disaster to the town. The father urges the couple to leave town right away, but the townspeople persuade Haige to stay. Desert Eagle agrees to come to Double Flag Town. When the bandits show up for the showdown, Haige is sitting stonily in the square between the two flag poles, waiting for Desert Eagle.... A stark and beautiful tale of revenge and a young man discovering his heroic strength in the mesmerizing setting of the Gobi Desert.  
 Setting: 1920s, filmed near Camel City 骆驼城 in Gansu Province 甘肃省.
- 112 **Temptress Moon** 风月 *Feng yue*  
 Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, 1997. 130min.  
 Stars Gong Li, Leslie Cheung . Cinematography: Christopher Doyle  
 In 1911 during the fall of the Qing Dynasty, 13-year old Zhongliang arrives at the Pang estate near Shanghai to live with his older sister and her husband who treat him like a servant and force perversions upon him when they are under the influence of opium, which the boy is charged with preparing for them. When the husband is found collapsed and apparently dying, Zhongliang flees, intending to go to Beijing. However, at the train station he is robbed by members of a triad who take him to Shanghai where under the tutelage of the Boss, he becomes a gigolo who, in collusion with other triad members, seduces rich married women in order to extort blackmail. One day the Boss orders him to seduce his cousin Ruyi, who is now the head of the Pang family, and, unfortunately, also an opium addict. Complicated family intrigues result in Zhongliang being unable to fulfill his mission for the triad; to punish him the Boss brings Ruyi to Shanghai to surreptitiously observe Zhongliang in action. The plot quickly collapses into the inevitable dark consequences of hurt, jealousy, anger, revenge, addiction, and gang justice. Although the plot was seen by many critics as difficult to understand, it makes perfect sense as an allegory of the betrayal of one generation of Chinese by another in the symbolic setting of corrupt Shanghai, as contrasted with Beijing, a cultural ideal intensely desired but never achieved.  
 Setting: 1911 – c. 1925, Shanghai 上海 and nearby town.
- 113 **Thatched Memories** 草房子 *Cao Fangzi*  
 Xu Geng 徐耿, 2000. 102min.  
 Relationships between father and son, teachers and pupils, school headmaster and teachers, children and adults, and how all their lives are affected by each other, are explored in the context of day-to-day village life. The story is narrated by the now grown son of the school headmaster beginning when he was ten years old, and unfolding in the way in which children experience life: people come and go, days go by, and things happen that are never explained. Children's recitations about following Chairman Mao firmly and their performance of a patriotic play about a 1942 Red Army battle are simply a part of the normalcy of daily life, coexisting equally with intra-mural sports competitions, heartless teasing, accidental fires, outdoor movies, lying to parents, receiving a beating, two teachers' love affair, an unexplained illness, persistent guilt. Adapted from the 1997 young people's novel *The Straw House*, by Cao Wenxuan.  
 Setting: 1962-65, rural village in Jiangnan 江南 area (south of the Yangzi including areas of Jiangsu 江苏, Jiangxi 江西, and Anhui 安徽 Provinces).

- 114 **Time to Live, a Time to Die** 童年往事 *Tongnian wangshi*  
 Hou Hsiao Hsien 侯孝贤, Taiwan, 1985. 125 min.  
 This is the second in a semi-autobiographical trilogy that begins with *A Summer at Grandpa's* (1984) and ends with *Dust in the Wind* ((1986). It chronicles the suffering of an extended family from the mainland who moved to Taiwan in 1948 as told from the point of view of an innocent child caught in a widening generation gap. Cut off from their past and experiencing social and technological changes that threaten to swallow their fragile existence, the family members' greatest concerns are focused within the fabric of their daily lives. One viewer commented "a real eye opening experience for most Americans, who like me know little about life in Taiwan". Hou's characteristic photography, with its extended unedited takes, is beautiful, too, particularly the street scenes and interiors.  
 Setting: 1940s-50s, southern Taiwan 台湾.
- 115 **To Live** 活着 *Houzhe*  
 Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1993. 132 minutes.  
 Stars Ge You, Gong Li, Jiang Wu  
 A straight-forward and intense narrative of an ordinary family from the late '40s to the late '70s as their lives are swept along on political and ideological tides over which they had little control, and about which they often had little clear understanding. After Fugui gambles away his wealthy family's property, his pregnant wife, Jiazhen, takes their daughter and leaves him, and he is reduced to eking out a living as an itinerant puppeteer. He gets caught in the Civil War and upon returning home and reuniting with his wife and two children, the family copes with the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. At the time this film was produced, the Cultural Revolution had been officially denounced, and Chinese filmmakers had moved beyond the heavy personal tragedies that comprised the 'scar literature' of the '70s to express a wider and more universal range of personal feelings and experiences. The film is a striking expression of the popular Chinese idiom of 'the old man who lost his horse', in which events that initially bring good fortune eventually transform into bad fortune, and vice-versa – a very Daoist ontology. An excellent overview of how the lives of ordinary people were affected by the historical events between the Chinese civil war and the end of the Cultural Revolution.  
 Loosely based on Yu Hua's 1993 novel of the same name.  
 Setting: 1940s – 1970s, a small city in northern China.
- 116 **Troubled Laughter** 苦恼人的笑 *Kunao ren de xiao*  
 Yang Yanjin 杨延晋 and Deng Yimin 邓一民, 1979. 92 min.  
 Made only three years after Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, this moving film is representative of a genre known as "scar literature" or "literature of the wounded" (伤痕 *shanghen wenxue*), which is characterized by expressions of the sufferings of oppressed and persecuted cadres and intellectuals under the rule of the Gang of Four. Set in the winter of 1975, *Troubled Laughter* depicts the lives and fates of Chinese intellectuals in the last years of the Cultural Revolution through the characters of a newspaper journalist pressured to lie in print, his old mentor to whom he goes for advice, his wife who accuses him of sacrificing her and their daughter so he can be a hero, and his Chief Editor, who betrays him. The film contains a number of sequences in which the cinematography is manipulated to express psychological states of mind – an unusual and innovative technique for the time and place in which the movie was made.  
 Setting: 1975, unidentified mid-sized Chinese city
- 117 **Twin Sisters** 姊妹花 *Zimei hua*  
 Zheng Zhengqiu 郑正秋, 1933. 90min. B&W  
 Twin sisters, separated as children, come together without knowing their identities when the poor sister is employed as a maid and wet nurse to her twin, who is the 7<sup>th</sup> concubine of a domineering landlord. The poor sister is accused of murder when she accidentally causes the

death of another maid; the judge in the case turns out to be a long lost elder brother. In the end, the long-suffering mother and her twin daughters, now reunited, climb together into a modern automobile and disappear into the distance. Innovative double exposure techniques were used to enable the immensely popular actress, Hu Die 胡蝶 (1907- 1989, aka ‘Butterfly Wu’, one of China’s most famous and beloved movie stars) to play the challenging double role of both sisters. This Third Generation ‘leftist’ film, like others of its time, condemns a social ideology that finds class divisions an acceptable determiner of fate; at the same time, it mitigates the injustice with a cinematic trope known as the ‘bright tail ending’ (明亮的尾巴 *mingliang de weiba*).

Setting: 1931, rural countryside and Shanghai 上海.

118 **Up the Yangzi** (documentary)

Chang Yung 张桥勇, Canada, 2007. 93 min.

A “Farewell Cruise” (to see the river before the flooding) that the director took with his family from Chongqing (Sichuan) through the Three Gorges Dam, inspired this young director to make a film exploring the impact of the dam on the lives of the Chinese who live and work along the Yangzi. Yu Shui (“Cindy”) is the oldest of three children from a family living on the river bank in extreme poverty. The cruise company hired her even though she couldn’t speak English and was shorter than the required height. Chen Boyu (“Jerry”), from a middle-class background is spoiled and cocky like many single sons – but he projects the image the cruise company wants: service personnel who are tall, good looking, and able to speak good English. The film documents the training and early experiences of these two trainees, and follows developments in their characters over two years as they move away from family traditions of farming and into an internationalizing and commoditizing world. Slow-paced and meditative, the film lets the characters and situations speak for themselves. The sound-track is mournful and haunting, combining pipa 琵琶 and guzhang 故障 with western string instruments. The young director says he conceives the cruise ship as a microcosm of what’s happening in China now, and of the journey down the river as an apocalyptic metaphor.

Setting: 2007-09, Chongqing 重庆市 and locations along the Yangzi-长江 to Yichang-宜昌市.

119 **Vive L'Amore** 爱情万岁 *Aiqing wansui*

Tsai Mingliang 蔡明亮, Taiwan, 1994. 118 min.

A young real estate agent misplaces the keys to a vacant apartment. They are found by a shy gay salesman who begins living there surreptitiously. At the same time, the realtor also uses the apartment for cell phone calls and her casual assignations – which at one point send the salesman into hiding under the bed while she and her lover go at it. Although the plot has comic edges, they are thwarted by the forlornness and ennui of rootless modern urban life with its emphasis on surface appearance. Tsai, a major player in New Taiwanese Cinema, favors a static camera, minimal dialogue, and long (often *very very* long) unedited takes that force the viewer to process the experience of time and emotion in agonizingly real time.

Setting: Early 90s, Taipei 台北市, Taiwan 台湾.

120 **White Haired Girl** 白毛女

Wang Bin 王宾, Shui Hua-水华, 1950. 110min. B&W

A villainous landlord forces a poor tenant farmer to give him his daughter as a concubine in repayment for a debt. Unable to bear the pain of the situation, the father commits suicide and the daughter is forced into servitude and raped. Later she flees into the mountains, gives birth to a stillborn son, and subsists by taking offerings of food left in a local temple. Because of these hardships, her hair turns completely white, and when occasionally glimpsed by local villagers, she is taken to be a “ghost”. In the meantime her true sweetheart has joined the Red Army, which two years later returns to rescue the village from the evil landlord’s oppression. One of the earliest films to be produced in the new People’s Republic, *White-haired Girl* was an important milestone in developing a Chinese national style that integrated operatic legends, plots, and artistic forms with Marxist laws of ‘class struggle’ applied to all dimensions of

society (e.g., gender, poverty, patriarchy, etc.). Later, during the Cultural Revolution *White Haired Girl* was re-fashioned by Jiang Qing as one of Eight Model Works (样板戏 *yangbanxi*), and is considered by many to be the most outstanding and purest revolutionary narrative of the Maoist era. The film print is dark and of poor quality, and the movie's excesses are best enjoyed as theatrical opera rather than as drama. Not easy viewing, but well worth seeing for those who appreciate direct and unmediated contact with important historic materials.

Setting: 1940s, rural Shaanxi Province 陕西省

- 121 **A Woman, A Gun, and a Noodle Shop** 三枪拍案惊奇 *San qiang pai'an jingqi*  
Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 2009. 95min

The owner of a successful noodle shop along the Silk Road in western Gansu province makes a deal with a police inspector in a plot to get revenge on his beautiful young wife who is having an affair with one of the noodle shop workers. This not so simple slapstick comedy is very loosely inspired by the U.S. Coen brothers' 1984 film *noir* comedy-thriller *Blood Simple* freely transported to an indeterminate time in the Chinese desert, featuring a cast of very Chinese characters with very Chinese motives. An elegant, colorful, stylish, extravagant cinematic romp from one of China's most versatile directors.

Setting: 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gansu Province 甘肃省 Silk Road-丝绸之路.

- 122 **Woman Assassin** 女刺客 *Nǚ cike*  
Cai Jiwei 蔡继渭, August 1<sup>st</sup> Film Studio, 1988. 94min.

To revenge her father's execution by a northern warlord, a daughter spends ten years tracking the warlord and plotting to assassinate him. She marries a man who agrees to collaborate with her on her mission; time passes; they have a daughter; they separate. During the Japanese occupation she takes refuge in a temple where she learns that the warlord has become a devout Buddhist. She buys a gun and stalks him, and eventually shoots him as he prays in the temple, surrendering herself immediately afterward to the police. Based on an actual person (Shi Jianqiao) and events that became a cause célèbre in the mid-1930s, exciting public passions and stirring endless debates about filial piety, revenge, gender, modernity, justice, and law. The film is beautifully photographed, the frames and colors elegantly composed and full of lovely naturalized symbolism. A stunning reminder that official "Red Movies" (红色院线 *hongse yuan xian*) aren't always simple "communist propaganda."

Setting: 1925-35, Anhui Province 安徽省; Tianjin-天津市.

- 123 **Women from the Lake of Scented Souls** aka **Woman Sesame Oil Maker** 湖鬼女 *Hu gui-nu*  
Xie Fei 谢飞, 1992. 1

Based on Zhou Daxin's novel *The Fragrant Oil Mill by the Lake of Scented Souls*, the film follows Xiang, an illiterate woman sold as a child bride to a man with a lame leg; she has a grownup son who suffers epileptic fits and a younger daughter. She has been carrying on a long term affair with a neighbor who is actually her daughter's father. Through developing a successful sesame oil mill she has become wealthy. Hearing about the oil, a Japanese business woman visits the mill decides to invest in expanding its production and sales. Meanwhile, Xiang needs to find a wife for her son, and manipulates a desperate local family into betrothing their daughter in exchange for a debt. Things come to a head when in a fit the epileptic son nearly strangles his wife, and the wife becomes witness to Xiang being beaten by her husband, and to her affair. Xiang is finally forced to come to grips with her true values. Made for a Chinese audience; this film explores the effect of new economic opportunities on family structure and responsibilities.

Setting: c. 1990, small village in Hebei Province 河北省.

- 124 **World without Thieves** 天下无贼 *Tianxia wu zei*  
Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚, 2004. 120 min.  
Stars Andy Lau, Ge You

In this tragicomedy by one of China's most popular director, Li and Bo, a pair of lovers, engage in con games, pick-pocketing, and petty thievery, finally extorting a BMW and escaping to Tibet where they encounter a country bumpkin who has taken his entire savings – 60,000 元 – out of a bank and plans to carry it back to his village on the train to pay for his wedding. Bo plans to steal the money, while Li, wanting out of the crime business, decides to protect the “innocent lamb”. The plot twists and turns when the three board the train and find themselves competing with a gang of clever thieves headed by Uncle Lee, whose amusing speech consists mostly of Confucian idioms. Although comedic in nature, the film is an engaging morality tale about the very real social problem of petty criminals in urban areas fleecing migrant workers and the problem of rampant pick pocketing and theft on China's sprawling public transportation services.

Setting: Early 2000s, various locations, including Tibet.

125 **The World** 世界 *Shijie*

Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯, 2006 134 min.

China's premier Sixth Generation director gives us an allegorical ‘behind the scenes’ story of young provincial workers at “The World”, an actual theme park on Beijing's periphery that features to-scale representations of famous foreign landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal, the Twin Towers, and the Leaning Tower of Pisa – a glittering and fun-filled experience for visitors, but dull, lonely, and disillusioning for those who work there day after day as guides, dancers, guards, or construction workers, playing dress-up and touting a global sophistication that is completely absent from their real lives, which are detached, anonymous, and directionless. Typical of Jia's films, the pace is slow and any underlying narrative structure – except for the slow and inexorable passing of time – is not obvious, leaving the viewer to draw his or her own conclusions.

Setting: Early 2000s, Beijing World Park- 北京世界公园 Beijing-北京市.

126 **Yang Ban Xi** 样板戏

Yuen Yanting (Yang Ting Yuen) 女, Netherlands, 2005. 90 min.

A messy documentary focused on the eight model works (样板戏 *yang ban xi*) of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and the outcomes of the lives of the artists who performed them. Juxtaposed images from different times and places stimulate viewers to create new meaning from their collision. Historic footage of the operas' performances during the Cultural Revolution is interleaved with present-time interviews with the performers (now in their 50s-70s) and with people who were children at the time (now in their late 30s-40s). Old black-and-white newsreels, sometimes brutally violent, are accompanied by the fictionalized voice of Jiang Qing, Mao's wife and designated “culture czar” of the time. Present-time re-productions of the model operas are confounded by contemporary hip-hop street dancers. This is not a neatly organized, unambiguous view of the Cultural Revolution's artistic production, but rather is consistent with the Mao nostalgia in today's China, which seems determined to avoid sully itself with deep analysis, while at the same time connecting to a cultural past by consuming images and chotchkes. This film is really about art and time -- about the inexorable transmutation of meaning and perception over time, about the impossibility of transmitting cultural experience intact across generations, and about the inevitability of artistic exuberance irrespective of form. The film attempts to do this by showing, not by telling. This is not to say that the film is entirely successful – but there is plenty here for thoughtful viewers to chew on for days afterward.

Setting: early 2000s. 1966-76, Cultural Revolution.

127 **Yellow Earth** 黄土地 *Huang tudi*

Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, 1984, 89 min.

The first of China's Fifth Generation films to receive international attention. Set in 1939 in an ‘unliberated’ Uigher village near the Yellow River in barren Shaanxi province, the film tells the story of a Red Army officer sent to collect folk melodies from the peasants (a practice dating back to Confucian times), which will be used to create military marching songs. A young

woman, inspired by his descriptions of the freedom young women enjoy under the Communists, determines to run away and join the Army – with tragic results. As well as being an artistic masterpiece, the film is a devastating critique of Mao’s project to impart revolutionary consciousness to the peasantry, and the folly of offering political ideology as cure for the hardships of earthbound peasant life. *Yellow Earth* is an almost perfect inversion of the revolutionary classic *Red Detachment of Women* (1961; described above).

Setting: 1939, Uigher village near the Yellow River in Shaanxi Province 陝西省.

128 **Yiyi** 一一 *Yiyi*

Edward Yang 楊德昌, Taiwan. 2000. 173 min.

A forlorn story of a middle-class family in flux in modern Taiwan. Soon after her son A-Di marries his pregnant girlfriend, Grandmother suffers a stroke and becomes comatose. Her daughter, Min-min retreats to a Buddhist temple. Min-min’s husband, NJ, who is also A’Di’s partner in a floundering business, becomes preoccupied with re-contacting an old girlfriend while on a business trip to Tokyo. Min-min and NJ’s children – Ting-ting, a girl of 15, and Yang-yang, a boy of 8 – are pretty much left to their own devices, and do their best to get by. Yang is a leading director in New Taiwanese Cinema.

Setting: late 90s, Taipei 台北市.

# Finding Chinese Films

In the age of the internet and global marketing, finding Chinese films is now immeasurably easier than it was a decade ago. Nonetheless, when renting or buying, unless you have special equipment you should confirm that you are getting:

- 1) NTSC (not PAL) format for VHS tapes and DVDs (not relevant for VCDs )
- 2) Regional code: “All Region” or “0” can be played on all players; Code “1” is for players sold in the US and its territories, Canada, and Bermuda.
- 3) English subtitles, unless you don’t need them (dubbing not recommended for serious viewers)
- 4) Mandarin soundtrack (unless you want Cantonese)

You should also be aware that “release date” invariably refers to the year in which the video version was released – and not the year the movie itself was released.

## Sources

### Amazon.com

Surprisingly, Amazon has become one of the most accessible and most reliable sources for both new and used Chinese movies. I will almost always choose a used movie over a new one when the seller describes the video as “new”, “like new”, “very good”, or “guaranteed to play”. A disadvantage is that movies are often released in different versions for different countries or with different editing, and sometimes it is not absolutely clear whether the used video is an exact match for the version on the product-description page. Nonetheless I have found Amazon’s used sellers to be consistently reliable – with only about a 1% unsatisfactory rate.

### YesAsia.com

This is a comprehensive and easily navigable site with excellent browsing capabilities. YesAsia has wide range of movies at reasonable prices, free international shipping, good descriptions of the film narrative, complete technical information -- the section that tells you the picture format, disk format (DVD or VCD), region code language (sound), subtitles, etc.; reader reviews are also sometimes included. As the films are shipped from Hong Kong, it usually takes 3-4 weeks to receive your order. In my experience, movies from YesAsia have always been exactly as represented and I have never had to return one for any reason.

### ChinaBooks.com

China Books (San Francisco, founded 1960, also has a print catalog) has a limited selection of Chinese films, including an uneven selection of documentaries on various aspects of Chinese culture. China Books’ collection is particularly strong on hard-to-find “Red Movies” 红色院线 produced over the years by the August 1 (八一 *Bayi*) Film Studio, founded in 1949 as a branch of the Peoples Liberation Army, which until recently monopolized the production of all films on China’s military history as well as many excellent films on cultural history (爱国电影 *aiguo dianying*, lit. “love of country films”). Most disks are priced at \$10. Caution: check for English subtitles.

### Netflix

Personally, I have never used Netflix, but many people have told me Netflix has a lot of Chinese movies, and a perusal of their site suggests that this is more and less true. Best when you have the title of the movie you want, or the name of the director, though in either case you may conjure irrelevant options; unfettered browsing is difficult.

### Not Recommended:

Sensasian.com. Formatting information on this site is unreliable; shipping charges are misrepresented; returns are next to impossible; and customer service virtually non-existent.

### Prices

The majority of Chinese films on disk can be purchased in the range of US\$10-15; used VHS tapes, when available, are usually much cheaper. It pays to shop around and compare prices before buying. The higher prices for recent releases usually come down if you are willing to wait. If you are planning to travel in China, take the opportunity to check out video retailers – the clerks are usually happy to help you identify NTSC disks with English subtitles, and the prices usually run between 10 and 60 元 (\$1.50 and \$10 US).

### Technology and Formatting Issues

Because videos and video players are not technologically uniform, you need to be sure that the picture formatting and the regional coding of the video matches your player's capabilities. NTSC formatting is standard in the US; PAL is standard in Asia. Techies: see Wikipedia entries on VHS, NTSC, PAL, DVD Region Code, etc.

### Video Formatting: NTSC and PAL

To play PAL videos you need to have either 1) a PAL tape-player that converts PAL-output to NTSC-input to a standard TV monitor; or 2) a TV monitor that can play PAL input. PAL players can be purchased in the US, but it usually takes some searching. You can also buy converter components that will convert PAL videos to NTSC tapes or disks so that you can play them on US equipment; some AV companies will do pricey conversions for you. Some PAL disks will play on some computers. Solving these problems may be desirable if, for example, you have some rare or unique tapes from China that are not commercially available.

### Video Formats: Blu-Ray/DVD/VCD / VHS Tapes

Blu-ray is a special video technology and a regular DVD player or computer will not play Blu-Ray disks. Regular DVD players and computers will play VCDs.

VCDs (Video Compact Disks) can store less information per disk than DVDs. VCDs are significantly less expensive to buy and have no regional coding or formatting, so basically they will play anywhere. There are some trade-offs. The image is a lower resolution – normally this is not a problem if you are watching on a regular TV screen or computer monitor, but images projected onto a large movie screen may be noticeably low resolution. A second factor is that a VCD normally contains no more than about 75 minutes of film, so most movies consist of two disks. A third factor is that there is no Set Up menu: subtitles are embedded (they cannot be turned on and off); you cannot select “chapters”, and in the case of dual Mandarin/Cantonese films, you choose either the left or the right audio channel from the audio-button on your remote. Also, VCDs lack the “Special Features” that have become common on DVD versions.

VHS (tapes): Although many older movies have been reissued on DVD, some Chinese movies remain available only on the older VHS tape technology. The upside is that used tapes are usually quite inexpensive, and if you have a video-tape player and don't need all the special features of disk versions, VHS tape may be your best choice.

### Regional Codes

As noted above, most video players manufactured for use in a particular geographical region will be pre-set to play only disks formatted for that region's code (this was a means by which entertainment industries could keep some control over marketing). With regard to regional codes, you have two choices: 1) buy only disks with "All Region" or "0" coding, or the coding for your geographical region, which is "1" in the case of the U.S.; or 2) buy a "region free" or "code free" DVD player that can play any regional code. These are regular models by major manufacturers that have been pre-set to be region free. Typically region-free players are not available in regular retail outlets, but can be special-ordered or bought directly from professional audio-visual suppliers. If you purchase a code-free player, check to be sure that your manufacturer's warranty will not be affected. Google "code free dvd players" for a plethora of options.

### Public Performance & Fair Use

Unless you purchase public performance rights for a movie that is not in Public Domain, or get written permission from the copyright holder, you are violating intellectual property regulations if you charge admission, use the screening for any commercial purposes, or screen it publicly. Fair use includes face-to-face teaching activities in a non-profit educational institution in a classroom or other instructional space.