

PLAYBILL #1: For all ages: short animations without words



Buffalo Boy and the Flute 牧笛 *Mùdí*
aka *The Cowboy's Flute*

Te Wei 特伟 and Qian Jajun 钱家骏, 1963.

Brush-painting In the style of Li Keran 李可染,
famous for his paintings of the Jiangnan 江南 area.

A poetic animation in which a boy with a flute takes a nap in a tree and dreams of himself and his water buffalo frolicking in their natural world. The animation techniques are masterfully integrated with the mercurial perceptual qualities of ink and paper, playing particularly with positive and negative space. Party leaders withdrew the film from circulation because it did not reflect 'class struggle'. In 1974, during the Cultural Revolution (文化大革命 *Wenhua Da Geming*, 1966-76) Li Keran was labeled a 'Black Artist' for using 'too much counter-revolutionary black ink' in his landscape paintings. Award winner at the 1979 Odense (Denmark) International Film Festival.

YouTube search: "Chinese animation taylor mosely": select #8 from the playlist.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3mX0FvKfPM&list=PLgxIEj6YIF3EyauNc9LdFFYmZ0J19RWge&index=8>

Three Monks 三个和尚 *Sān gè héshàng*

A Da 阿达 (Xu Jingda 徐景達), 1980.

Variation on a well-known proverb:

"One monk will carry two buckets of water; two monks will share the load;
with three monks no one wants to carry water".

Cel animation, 20 min



A young monk lives in a temple at the top of a hill and every day goes down the hill, fetches two buckets of water from a stream, and carries them back up the hill on a carrying pole. One day a tall skinny monk shows up, and the two go through a period of adjustment, watched over by a figure of Guanyin 观音 (a benevolent bodhisattva), and a pesky mouse. Then a fat monk shows up, helps carry water, but drinks it all up himself. When the mouse knocks over a candle and sets the temple afire, the monks unite to put it out, live harmoniously, and invent a solution to the problem of fetching water. This is one of the most well-known animations both in China and internationally. Winner of a Golden Rooster, and four international awards including Best Short Film at Berlin International Film Festival.

YouTube search: "Chinese old animation bankscai": select #11 from the playlist.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLHbJtEy_E0&list=PLU8hdgsgEcAQUFjaeuNNJ18-E4iDb_y3S&index=8



Monkeys Fish the Moon 猴捞月 *Hóuzi lāo yuè*

Zhou Keqin 周克勤, A Da 阿达 (Xu Jingda 徐景達), 1981.

Cut-paper, 10 min.

Inspired by A Da's experience in the countryside
watching a peasant harvest dance.

In this playful animation, noted for its striking color and lighting effects, monkeys eventually dance in celebration of harvesting the moon's reflection. Prize-winner at 1982 Zagreb (Croatia) Animation Festival and considered a prime example of the 'New Chinese Animation' in the early post-Mao era.

YouTube search: "Chinese animation taylor mosely": select #13 from the playlist.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXAGAWHKwZ8&list=PLgxIEj6YIF3EyauNc9LdFFYmZ0J19RWge&index=13>

The Deer's Bell 鹿铃 *Lù líng*

Tang Cheng 唐澄, Wu Qiang 邬强, 1982.

Brush painting, 20 min



After rescuing an injured fawn with help from her grandfather, a girl and the fawn develop a close and tender relationship. When the young deer recovers and is ready to return to the wild, the sad girl puts a bell on the deer which she can hear when it is out of sight. Awards from Golden Rooster, Chinese Ministry of Culture, and Moscow International Film Festival.

YouTube search: "Chinese animation movies Joseph K Waits": select #6 from the playlist.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmFIQDrV_mw&list=PLGz_TN8VxL37bmj4wXC-7NxwbsnC8LLqe&index=6

About Chinese Animation

The evolution of Chinese animation followed a path different from that of the Eurowest, particularly the US where animations have been traditionally seen as children's entertainment, and therefore somewhat frivolous. From its beginnings, Chinese animation aimed to embody moral and educational values in entertaining imagery improvised from indigenous artistic and folk traditions. Its audience embraces all ages. Although many Chinese animations are now available on the internet (viz. YouTube), searching for them can be frustrating and time-consuming. For this reason I've included key search terms with the YouTube URLs as accessed in April 2020. Note that translations of titles can be variable, and "animation", "anime", and "cartoon" are often (and inaccurately) used interchangeably.

Birth and Early Growth: 1926-1949. Chinese animation began in 1926 with the Wan Brothers' (万氏兄弟) "Uproar in an Art Studio", inspired by the American Fleischer Brothers' *Out of the Inkwell* series (1918-1929). In both cases, an artist's drawing jumps up off the paper into the real world and runs around creating mischief until he can be captured and put 'back into the inkwell'. Although this integration of animation with live action was soon abandoned by American animators, it continued to be occasionally used by Chinese animators, and later resurfaced with the advent of digital imaging.

The 30s saw widespread domestic unrest triggered by rural and urban poverty, corruption in the Republic's Nationalist government, and constant military invasions by the Japanese. During this entire decade many writers, artists, and filmmakers produced 'leftist' works that reflected social and political issues, often ridiculing Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石 and the Nationalists. By 1937, the Japanese occupied Shanghai, and filmmakers fled the city. In 1938, Chiang finally declared war on Japan, and China entered World War II (1938-45). From 1945-49 Chiang's Nationalist armies and Mao Zedong 毛泽东's Communist forces fought a civil war, with the Communists emerging victorious in 1949.

The 'Golden Age' of Shanghai Animation: 1957-66. In 1950, the Ministry of Culture in the newly founded People's Republic of China directed an animation team (later to become the Shanghai Animation Film Studio) to create educational and entertaining films for children that would promote socialist ideology in distinctively Chinese (not Soviet) styles. Following Mao's dictum to draw inspiration from the people, to serve the people, and to elevate the peoples' artistic appreciation, the studio developed animation techniques inspired by indigenous Chinese cultural arts including paper-cuts, folded paper, puppets, and ink painting. In 1956, Chairman Mao launched the Hundred Flowers Movement (百花齐放 *Bǎihuā Qífàng*) and encouraged artists to study Western animations in order to identify and develop distinctively Chinese characteristics in their own artistic works. But an Anti-Rightist Campaign (反右运动; *Fǎnyòu Yùndòng*) soon followed (1957-59); the Party cracked down on 'excesses' that had arisen. During most of the Cultural Revolution (文化大革命 *Wenhua Da Geming*, 1966-76) animation studios were closed. In 1973 some artists returned to the studio to produce a few propaganda films.

The Second Golden Age: 1978-c.1990. In 1976, after Mao's death and the arrest of the Gang of Four (四人帮 *Sìrénbāng*), the Shanghai Animation Studio re-opened, and remained subsidized by the government in the centrally planned economy. During this period some Chinese animations using ink-painting and cut-paper techniques won international prizes.

Chinese Animation Techniques

Cel animation (aka *traditional, hand-drawn* or *classical* animation): A succession of individual frames is copied onto transparent acetate sheets (cels) and filmed one-by-one, often against a background, onto motion picture film—rather like a film version of a 'flip book'. The 'smoothness' of the illusion of motion depends on the similarity of sequential frames to one another and the rate at which they are filmed, usually one or two exposures at a rate of 24 frames-per-second. By the 1940s, frame-by-frame tracings of live-action film footage (*rotoscoping*) were often used to create lifelike motion in the animation, particularly in full-length feature films. Today, digital computerized techniques have largely replaced traditional animation.

Brush-painting: This form of cel animation is like seeing traditional Chinese ink-and-brush painting (国画 *guohua*) spring to life, and is particular to the history of Chinese animation. The most famous of these animations are drawn from the styles of well-known master artists such as Qi Baishi 齐白石 and Li Keran 李可染.

Cut-paper animation: Paper-cutting is a ubiquitous Chinese folk art involving the use of special scissors to create intricate stencil-like images (birds, flowers, Beijing opera masks, zodiac animals, even large complex landscapes or rural scenes) from sheets of colored paper. Animators typically create characters with hinged limbs and use stop-action filming techniques in which slight changes are filmed one or two frames at a time. The visual effect is often similar to Asian shadow puppetry.