

director: Wang Ping (orig. Wang Guangzhen, 1916-1990), veteran actress & woman director. Produced jointly by the August First Film Studio (Bayi dianying zhipianchang), Peking Film Studio (Beijing dianying zhipianchang), The Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio (Zhongyang xinwen jilu dianying zhipianchang).

When first released, this film was billed as a historic epic poem (shishi) which re-tells the story of the Chinese revolution in song and dance. The official blurb which accompanies the film reads:

This is an epic created in commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. More than 3,000 people from some 70 units in Peking, the capital city, Shanghai and the People's Liberation Army contributed to the creation with revolutionary fervour.

Beginning with the prologue "Sunflowers Face the Sun," it is divided into six parts -- "Dawn in the East," "A Single Spark That Sparks a Prairie Fire," "On the Long March," "Flames of War Against Japanese Aggression," "Burying the Chiang Kai-shek Regime," and "The Chinese People Have Stood Up." There are 28 scenes with 24 dances, song-dance performance and songs with dramatic action, 30 revolutionary songs and 14 pieces of recitations. The whole epic is an affair of grandeur and colour, giving a graphic account of the events beginning from the birth of the People's Republic in 1949 -- the historical course of the revolution of the Chinese people, who have put up a tough fight to liberate themselves and advanced wave upon wave under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao.

During the Deng Xiaoping era the film fell into disfavor in China, save for an interest in its technical aspects. Later on, greater interest in it was revived.

Discussion questions:

1. Why do you think the film fell into disfavor in China after the mid-1970s?
2. Are there elements in the film that you might imagine a Chinese audience found attractive at the time it was produced?
3. Why has this film and newer films with similar subject matter (such as "Song of the Chinese Revolution", co-dir. By Wang Ping and Huang Baoshan, 1985) come back into governmental favor?