

Baimao nǚ (The White Haired Girl)

白毛女

date: 1972

director: Sang Hu

This film is one of the most famous **geming yangban xi** or Revolutionary Peking Operas. It combines singing, traditional operatic movements and modern ballet. An earlier version was done in 1950, directed by Shui Hua.

This story is supposedly based on a folk-tale from north China about a young girl who fled landlord oppression and sexual exploitation to live alone in a cave, where, because of a lack of certain nutrients in her diet, her hair turned prematurely white.

Due to this unnatural aspect of her appearance, people in the area mistook her for a ghost and shunned her, which is, in part, what she wanted -- to be left completely alone (and therefore unharmed) by society. But the lack of social intercourse further traumatizes her. She lives off sacrificial offerings left by worshippers in a nearby temple, which the local villagers interpret as visits from a deity.

When the People's Liberation Army (PLA) enters the area, soldiers gradually coax her out of her seclusion. She is overjoyed when she is finally made to realize that the PLA has brought with it a new socialist order in which landlord oppression is a thing of the past.

There are a number of differences from the 1950 version of the film.

questions:

1. Where do you think the original "folk-tale," if there was one, left off and where does the "propaganda" begin?
2. Formalistically speaking, this film relies on techniques taken from Western-style modern dance and ballet. Do you think these are employed effectively?
3. How do you think the film succeeded or failed in its mission to convince the audience of the superiority of the new order?