

决裂

Jué lie (Breaking With Old Ideas) 1975

"Breaking With Old Ideas" is one of the few non-operatic feature films made during the "Gang of Four" era, that is the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969) and its immediate aftermath of hard-line "ultra-left" Communist rule (1970-1976). The so-called "Gang of Four" (Si Ren Bang) included Madame Mao (Jiang Qing), an actress from Shanghai in the 1930s who had gone to Yan'an, where she met Mao. It was alleged by their critics that they had seized power during Mao's dotage and perpetrated many of the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, a nation-wide purge of "revisionist" and "capitalist" elements within the Communist Party, including State Chairman Liu Shaoqi and his number two man, Deng Xiaoping (who again came to power in 1978, after the fall of the "Gang of Four"). Since Jiang Qing herself had been an actress, she was particularly interested in theater and film productions and was the prime mover behind the Revolutionary Model Peking Opera (geming yangban xi) genre which developed during the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath.

"Breaking With Old Ideas," however, is a spoken drama and has none of the singing and operatic movements of the yangban xi. Set in the late 1950s during an earlier period of struggle between two lines (the revisionist line, which was broadly similar to that of the Soviet Communists in Russia, stressing the value of expertise and urban technology, and the "purer" communist line advocated by Mao Zedong, which stressed rural revolutionary zeal, dedication and volunteerism). This was sometimes referred to as the struggle of "Red" vs. "expert."

The story centers around an attempt by the radical pro-Mao faction (in this case represented by one handsome middle-aged man who begins to look more and more like the Chairman himself) to reform university education, already in the hands of the revisionists, who look like spindly bureaucrats and choking smokers. In essence, it is a struggle between two different factions within the Communist movement.

Highlights of the film include river rafting, warm embraces, pig castrating, cancellation of entrance exams to university, and the celebration of the multiple talents and virtuosity of a re-entry woman (and mother) as a mature-age university student.

One of the tenets of Maoism was that a person can change his/her thinking, i.e. fundamental world outlook or approach to life, and become a revolutionary even though he/she may have once held mistaken views. In a way, that is an essential theme of this rare film -- rare in that it is one of the few existing works of art or literature in which the Gang of Four, i.e. the radical Maoists, are still able to argue their case. For that reason it is, ironically, one of the few films in this selection now banned in China.

questions:

1. Who are the revisionists in the film and who are the true revolutionaries?
2. How do the "radicals" gain the sympathy of the audience in the film? What qualities do they have to recommend them?

3. What insights to the Chinese revolution did you gain from this film?
4. How would you compare it with the geming yangban xi (Revolutionary Model Peking Operas)?
5. Why do you think this film was made in 1975?