

Chinese Cinema (CHIN2302 / GENT 0421)

A Timeline of Modern Chinese History for Students of Chinese Film Studies
-- Jon Eugene von Kowallis

1644 Manchu invasion of China begins the Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty.

1839-1842 First Opium War. China attempts to suppress the illegal Opium trade conducted by foreign merchants. Britain defeats China, winning control of Hong Kong, the opening of five major ports and other trade and missionary concessions.

1852-1864 Taiping Rebellion – Taiping Tianguo (lit. “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace”) a partly Christian-inspired rebellion led by Hong Xiuquan, a failed civil service exam candidate of Hakka origin engulfs much of southern China.

1894-5 Sino-Japanese War. China defeated by Japan. Taiwan ceded to Japan.

1896 – **First Western film screened in China** -- period of early film activities begins (1896-1921)

1898 Hundred Days Reform (aka the 1898 Reforms or Wuxu bianfa).

1900 Boxer Uprising. Anti-foreign and anti-Chinese-Christian riots in Shandong spread throughout much of north China, later with the tacit approval of Cixi Taihou, the Empress Dowager. Suppressed by an invasion of the Baguo Lianjun (Armies of the Eight Allied Nations).

1904-5 Russo-Japanese War (fought mainly on Chinese territory in Manchuria). Russia defeated, marking the first victory of an Asian nation over a European power.

1905 – **First Chinese film “Ding Jun Shan” (Conquering Martial Mountain)**, featuring Peking opera star Tan Xinpei (1847-1917) by Chinese photographer Ren Fengtai (1850-1932).

1911 Revolution breaks out in Wuchang. December 26 – Sun Yatsen (Sun Zhongshan) elected provisional president of the Republic of China (Zhonghua Minguo).

1912 Qing emperor Puyi abdicates. First year of the Republic. February 15 - Sun yields power to the former Qing general Yuan Shikai.

1914 Yuan suspends both houses of the National Assembly. Assumes dictatorial power.

1915 Dissatisfied with the title president, Yuan makes plans to proclaim himself Hongxian (“Great Constitutional”) emperor. Southern generals (Cai E, etc.) and Sun Yatsen revolt. September 15 – radical journal (Xin) qingnian (New Youth) begins publication, ed. by Chen Duxiu.

1916-1927 Warlord Era begins after June 6, 1916 when Yuan dies and his generals start to scramble for power. Xu Shichang and later Duan Qirui serve as president.

1917 China declares war on Germany and Austria (August 14). Monarchist "Pigtailed" general Zhang Xun attempts to restore the Qing dynasty (July 1) – fails in less than a month.

1919 May Fourth Movement. Anti-imperialist, anti-warlord demonstration by students in Peking followed by an anti-"feudal" cultural movement, it criticizes the weak-kneed position of the Warlord government toward Japan and advocates a new literature written in vernacular (modern spoken) Chinese with new content to awaken the masses. Lu Xun was the chief creative writer.

1920s period in film making:

1921 – **first long feature film produced in Shanghai "Yan Ruisheng"** (based on a true-life murder story, dir. Ren Pengnian).

1922 Sun Yat-sen orders the launching of the Northern Expedition to defeat the warlords and unify China.

1925 March 12 – Sun Yatsen dies. May 30th Incident -- British colonial police fire on demonstrators in Shanghai, killing 9 people.

1926 Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), a military leader in the Kuomintang, succeeds Sun Yatsen. Begins break with Communists (March 20 in "Zhongshan Gunboat Incident"). Chiang appointed Commander-in-Chief of National Revolutionary Army (June 5).

1927 Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek carries out anti-Communist purge in Shanghai (April 12) and Canton (December). Large-scale massacre of communists.

1927-1937 Nanjing (Nanking) Decade. Chiang re-unites China, defeating warlords and Communists, establishing the Kuomintang's Central Government in Nanjing.

1931 Japanese military invade and occupy Manchuria (China's three northeastern provinces – Dongbei).

1932 Japanese forces attack Shanghai (January 28). Repulsed by divisions of the Chinese National Army. March 9 – Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo established in Manchuria with its capital in Changchun (renamed Xinjing).

1937 **Film Malu Tianshi (Street Angel)** dir. and screenplay by Yuan Muzhi, starring male lead Zhao Dan and female singer Zhou Xuan – a realistic romance set in Shanghai reflects the lives of refugees from the Japanese occupied territories in Manchuria.

1937-1945 Japanese invasion and occupation. Chiang's govt. retreats to Chongqing (Chungking) capital of the mountainous inland province of Sichuan. Most of China occupied. Former Kuomintang leader Wang Jingwei heads puppet government for the Japanese in Nanjing. Communists fight guerilla-style war against the Japanese from Yan'an (a cave town in north-west China).

1945 Japan surrenders to Allies. Control of Taiwan given to Nationalist Government.

1947 February 28th Incident in Taiwan. Local protesters suppressed by Nationalist army.

1949 Communist forces defeat those of the Nationalist (Kuomintang) Government in the Chinese Civil War. Mao Zedong proclaims the People's Republic of China in Beijing on October 1. Chiang Kai-shek flees to Taiwan, continuing the Kuomintang regime there. In film, the period of the first 17 years of the PRC begins.

1949 **Film Wuya yu maque (Crows and Sparrows)**, dir. Zheng Junli, screenplay by Chen Baichen, starring Zhao Dan, reflects developments in the Chinese Civil War and the last months of Kuomintang rule on mainland China through the vehicle of a tenant vs. landlord conflict in an apartment building in Shanghai.

1950 Korean War begins (June 25). Chinese People's Volunteers enter Korea in support of the DPRK (North Korean Communist) forces fighting the UN (mostly US and its allies) and ROK (South Korean) forces.

1950 **Film Wu Xun zhuan (The Life of Wu Xun)** dir. / sc. Sun Yu, starring Zhao Dan and Wu Yin. Shanghai: Kunlun Film Studios. Film posits education as the way for poor people to empower themselves – heavily criticized by the Communist government media as Rightist.

1953 Korean War ends in armistice. US troops remain in South Korea until present day.

1955 Bandung Conference. Chinese writer Hu Feng arrested as a counter-revolutionary.

1956 **Film Zhufu (The New Year's Sacrifice)**, dir. Sang Hu, screenplay by Xia Yan, starring Bai Yang is a filmic adaptation of Lu Xun's 1924 story of the same title which seeks to incorporate native forms (such as operatic influence). Xia Yan was an old enemy of Lu Xun. Won prize at Karlovy Vary FF in 1957.

1956 Khrushchev criticizes Stalin's personality cult (February 25). Mao launches "Hundred Flowers Campaign" (May 2) calling for greater artistic and academic freedom.

1957 Anti-Rightist Campaign begins (June 8).

1958 Great Leap Forward (Da Yue Jin).

1959 The National People's Congress appoints Liu Shaoqi State Chairman (president) of the PRC in succession of Mao (April 27). Lushan Plenum (August 16). Serious drought (July-August).

1961 The play "Hai Rui Dismissed From Office" (Hai Rui baguan) published (January 9). Yanshan ye hua "Evening Talks at Yanshan" appear in three Beijing newspapers (March 1961 – September 1962) criticizing Mao.

1963 **Film Zaochun eryue (Early Spring in the Second Lunar Month)** dir. and screenplay by Xie Tieli. Based on the novella *Eryue* by martyred Communist writer Rou Shi (1902-1931), the film re-explores the role of intellectuals in the revolution. Denounced by secret police chief Kang Sheng as "a poisonous weed".

1964 **Filmic adaptation of the revolutionary model opera Dongfang Hong (The East is Red)** presages the beginning of the "Cultural Revolution" (Wenhua da geming). See the website www.morningsun.org for information on this film and the culture of the era 1964-76.

1965 **Film Wutai jiemei (Stage Sisters)** dir. Xie Jin, sc. Lin Gu, Xu Jin, Xie Jin. Suggests a direction Chinese film could have gone in (realism), rather than the path it would end up taking during the next decade of the Cultural Revolution ("revolutionary romanticism").

1966 Politburo announces its decision to set up the Cultural Revolution Group – calls for attacks on "all representatives of the bourgeoisie who have infiltrated the Party, government, army and cultural world".

1966-1969 "**Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution**". Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and other high CP leaders are purged as revisionists and capitalist roaders. Chairman Mao returns to power. Near civil war conditions eventuate, finally suppressed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), led by Lin Biao, designated Mao's "closest comrade in arms".

1969-1976 "Gang of Four" Era. Mao Zedong's "leftist" ideology & PLA holds sway.

1968 **Taiwan**, still under martial law, produces **film Qiu jue (Execution in Autumn)** a costume-drama set in the past with implications for the present-day?

1972 new filmic version of the **Geming yangban xi (Revolutionary Model Opera Baimao nu)** produced under Jiang Qing (Chairman Mao's wife). Others in this genre include Hongse niangzi jun (Red Detachment of Women); Hong deng ji (The Red Lantern); Zhi qu weihu shan (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy).

1975 **The film Juelie (Breaking With Old Ideas)** dir. Li Wenhua, set in the early 1960s, made to articulate the ideals of the Maoist faction within the Communist Party and to justify the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. Last hurrah of the "Gang of Four".

1975 Chiang Kai-shek dies (April 5) on Taiwan.

1976 Tangshan Earthquake (July 28). Mao dies (September 9). Four politburo members (Jiang Qing [Madame Mao], Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen) known as the Gang of Four are arrested. October 7 – Hua Guofeng succeeds Mao as chairman of the CCPCC.

1978 Deng Xiaoping in power. Economic reforms and opening to outside world. The New Era in film begins.

1978-9 Democracy Wall in Beijing. The movement is later suppressed.

1982 Hu Yaobang elected General Secretary of the Communist Party (September 12). Rise of reformist premier Zhao Ziyang.

1983 **Hong Kong film *Banbian ren (Ah Ying)* dir. Fang Yuping (West. Allen Fong).** Based loosely on the life of the late aspiring director Ge Wu, the film explores issues of art, class, and the intellectual in the diaspora. See article by Jon Kowallis in course reader from *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*.

1984 **The film *Huang Tudi (Yellow Earth)* dir. by Chen Kaige** signals the emergence of the **Fifth Generation** of film makers.

1986 ***Furong zhen (Hibiscus Town)*** by veteran dir. Xie Jin, starring Liu Xiaoqing, questions the Cultural Revolution from a humanist perspective.

1987 ***Hong Gaoliang (Red Sorghum)* dir. Zhang Yimou, starring Gong Li**, marks the entry of the xungen (roots-seeking) movement in literature into film.

1987 In Taiwan -- martial law (dictatorship) lifted by ROC government. Democracy eventuates in Taiwan. Ban on Lu Xun's works (and those of other May Fourth writers) lifted.

1989 Mourning for Hu Yaobang (April 22). **Demonstrations at Tian-an-men Square** (May 13). Students occupy Square, joined by workers. Zhao Ziyang appears in Square to express sympathy with demonstrators. Zhao forced out of office. Government troops force students out of Square (June 3-4), some accounts testify to massacre. June 9 – Deng Xiaoping, Yang Shangkun, Li Peng, Qiao Shi, Wan Li, Yao Yilin, Wang Zhen, Peng Zhen and other leaders appear on television, praising the military actions which cleared the Square. Zhao Ziyang, Tian Jiyun and Hu Qili are notable by their absence. Deng resumes power, pledging to continue the economic reform and “open” policies initiated at the end of 1978. Official Chinese media announces “martial law troops” have arrested over 400 people in Beijing, Hebei, Tianjin and Shanghai. More arrests follow.

1989 **Film Ju Dou**, dir. Zhang Yimou, starring Gong Li, co-produced with Tokuma Shoten, Japan. Set in a north-China dye factory in the 1920s, the film was interpreted by some as an allegory to more recent events. Won Best Film award in Chicago FF 1991.

1989 **Taiwan film Beiqing chengshi (City of Sadness)** dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien, sc. Wu Nien-chen, Chu Tien-wen indirectly explores the then still seldom-broached topic of the 2/28/1947 massacre of Taiwanese civilians by Kuomintang troops. In some viewers' eyes, the film also had implications regarding more recent events in Beijing (June 1989).

1991- **Film Da hong denglong gaogao gua (Raise the Red Lantern)** dir. Zhang Yimou, starring Gong Li. Based on the novel *Qi qie chengqun (Wives and Concubines)* by Mo Yan, wins top prizes at film festivals in Belgium, China, Italy, the UK and US.

1992 US economic recession. Clinton defeats Bush (Senior). Large scale US imports of Chinese goods jump-start Chinese economy.

1992 **Taiwan film Xiyan (The Wedding Banquet)** dir. Li An (West. Ang Lee) broaches topic of gay people living in the Chinese diaspora. The good humour and moving plot line won the director international acclaim. His other films including *Yinshi nannu (Eat Drink Man Woman – 1994)*; *Sense and Sensibility (1995)*; *Ride with the Devil (1999)*; *Wo hu cang long (Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon -- 2000)*; and *Brokeback Mountain (2005)*.

1993 Deng Xiaoping's southern tour. Deng emphasizes importance of economic progress. US president Clinton calls China "a strategic partner" of the US.

1993 **Film Bawang bieji (Farewell My Concubine)** dir. Chen Kaige, with Leslie Cheung and Gong Li. Through the lives of two Beijing opera actors explores issues of gender, institutional child abuse, integrity and repression against the backdrop of recent Chinese history. Compare with the two films below.

1993 **Film Lan fengzheng (The Blue Kite)**, dir. Tian Zhuangzhuang. Retells Chinese history from the death of Stalin (1953) through the outset of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969) from a child's perspective. Bears comparison with Gunter Grass' *The Tin Drum*.

1994 **Film Huo zhe (To Live)** dir. Zhang Yimou, with Gong Li and male lead Ge You. Retells modern Chinese history from the mid-1940s to the late 1970s through the vehicle of one family's struggle to survive. Compare with "The Blue Kite."

1997 Hong Kong is returned to China and declared a "Special Administrative Region".

1999 US bombers hit Chinese embassy building in Belgrade, (the former) Yugoslavia.

2000 Minjindang or Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Chen Shuibian, known to favor independence, elected president of Taiwan.

2001 US president Bush calls China a “strategic rival.” US navy spy-plane clashes with Chinese navy plane over Chinese airspace. Chinese plane crashes, killing pilot. US plane crash-lands in China without casualties. Chinese authorities return crew members, but disassemble and examine plane over US government protests, sending it back in crates.

2002 **Film Yingxiong (Hero)** dir. Zhang Yimou. Influenced by the success of Li An’s “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,” Zhang Yimou abandoned contemporary topics for the gongfu (martial arts genre), with mixed reaction from the critical world.

2003 **Film Kala shi tiao gou (Cala, My Dog) – a black comedy dir. by Sixth Generation film-maker Lu Xuechang, starring Ge You** examines the 1995 Beijing municipal government’s policy to catch all unlicensed dogs in the city and force their owners to pay large fines from the perspective of a laid-off factory worker and his family.

2004 (September) Communist Party Plenum chaired by new leader Hu Jintao emphasizes the importance of strengthening the Party’s ruling capabilities and maintaining the “advanced nature of Party members” – more political study sessions required of cadres.

2005 (April) Chinese demonstrators in Beijing, Shanghai and other Chinese cities protest Japanese textbooks glossing over WWII atrocities in China at Japanese embassy and consulates over three weekends. South Korean protests erupt in Seoul. 26-27 April (Taiwan opposition) Kuomintang party leader Lian Zhan visits mainland China.

2006 (February) Taiwan DPP President Chen Shuibian dissolves the already defunct Taiwanese “Committee on Reunification with the Mainland,” provoking condemnation from mainland leaders, including Hu Jintao.