

THE FRIDAY NOON FILM SERIES for FALL 2004

Cinematic Perspectives on Chinese History and Civilization

This series will be presented by Professor Jennifer Purtle

October 1: Hero, Chinese cut (Ying xiong)

Zhang Yimou, 2002, 107 min.

At the end of China's Warring States, the Kingdom of Qin is the most ruthless and ambitious of the seven states. Its king is the target of assassins from all over China. Of all the would-be assassins, Broken Swrod, Flying Snow and Sky are the most dangerous. When Nameless kills all three, he is offered a chance to meet the king. Nameless explains to the king how he exposed and attacked their weaknesses, but the king tells a different version of the same story. Hero is a martial arts epic helmed by world-renowned Chinese director Zhang Yimou, who led the cast and crew to different areas of China to capture the beauty of the landscape.

October 8: Life on a String (Bian zou bian chang)

Chen Kaige, 1990, 110 min.

Set in a distant, mythical past, this visually impressive film tells the story of a man's search for a possible cure for his blindness. Before his death, a musician master of the sanxian, a three-stringed guitar, tells his apprentice that if he plays the instrument until he has broken 1000 strings, he will find a prescription to cure his blindness inside the instrument. Many years later the apprentice, now a master himself, is close to the goal, but his own apprentice is causing problems by romancing a local girl and stirring up the anger of a local community, in which two clans are feuding with each other.

October 15: Project A (A ji hua)

Jackie Chan, 1983, 106 min.

In late 19th-century Hong Kong the British may rule the land, but the pirates rule the waters. Reluctantly, the Coast Guard is given money to fight these pirates, but the pirates themselves have many contacts (that is, bribed officials) in the government, and seek to thwart the Coast Guard's efforts to eliminate them. One Coast Guard officer is Dragon Ma, who is determined that his beloved Coast Guard will not be made fools of.

October 22: The Last Emperor

Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987, 218 min.

A stunning milestone in the history of cinema, this is director Bernardo Bertolucci's original director's cut. John Lone Stars as Pu Yi, emperor of China, who comes from a long history of a tradition that is irreversibly altered by two world wars and fierce political upheaval. Guided by his English mentor, Pu Yi is forced to leave the lavish, protective walls of his kingdom and somehow find the strength to build a new life in a strange world he has always longed to explore, but has never really known.

October 29: Twin Stars (Yin han shuang xing)

Shi Dongshan, 1931.

One of the first films by Wang Renmei, a famous actress of the 1930s. "The realistic quality of Wang's performances brought a sense of spontaneity to a national cinema long dominated by exaggeration and mannerism" --Encyclopedia of Chinese Film

November 5: City Without Night (Bu ye cheng)

Tang Xiaodan, 1957.

One of the few contemporary films to treat the Chinese bourgeoisie in detail and with some sympathy. During the Sino-Japanese War, a young industrialist named Zhang Bohan returns from his studies in England to find his father's textile factory under threat of Japanese takeover. Convinced that China's future depends on domestic industrial development, he turns the enterprise into a great success until 1949, when he is cheated through

speculation by American capitalists. The new PRC government promotes the Chinese bourgeoisie in the interest of national development, but Zhang tries to dodge taxes and regulations. After learning from family conflicts and encounters with workers in his factory, he admits his mistakes and is treated leniently by the government. Ironically, shortly after the film's release, the CCP took over all private industries and left all capitalists financially ruined and politically outcast.

November 12: Crows and Sparrows (Wu ya yu ma qie)

Zheng Lunli, 1949, 111 min.

This depiction of life inside a Shanghai tenement building in the waning months of the civil war is perhaps the most renowned of China's social commentary films of the 1940s. Tenants from various backgrounds must figure out where they will go after their evil landlord, a high-ranking KMT official, makes plans to sell the building and flee to Taiwan. Liberation by the PLA saves the day. Shooting was completed just days before the real liberation of Shanghai, and the film was saved from KMT confiscation by being hidden in the film studio ceiling. Other elaborate attempts to deceive the KMT censors, including hiding the real script and presenting censors with a fake one, proved to be unnecessary, as post-liberation sound editing allowed common anti-KMT slang to be openly and vigorously presented to film audiences for the first time. "A milestone in Chinese film history, worthy to be shown alongside the best of international cinema." --Jay Leyda

November 19: Hibiscus Town (Fu rong zhen)

Xie Jin, 1986, 126 min.

This film chronicles the chaotic decade of the Cultural Revolution through the lives of several men and women in the small town of Hibiscus. The political movements before and during the tumultuous years are strongly denounced in the movie. Winner of 1987 Golden Rooster awards for best feature film, best actress, and best supporting actor.

* November 24 * (Wednesday): The Story of Qiu Ju (Qiu ju da guan si)

Zhang Yimou, 1993, 100 min.

A socially conscious comedy about a woman seeking justice for a simple slight against her husband. Along the way, she encounters a welter of bureaucracy and politesse in this well-observed portrait of contemporary Chinese life. The urban setting and the radical realism of the shooting style were major departures in the career of director Zhang Yimou, but gritty realist depictions of poor city dwellers would soon become common among the new wave of "Sixth Generation" directors, making this one of Zhang's most influential films.

December 3: Quitting (Zuotian)

Zhang Yan, 2001.

In the late 1980s a new film star, Jia Hongsheng, emerged in China. Labeled "the thug idol," he gained fame playing gangsters and heroes in a series of films by young directors and soon became the actor of choice for Chinese sixth generation filmmakers. Jia's naturally fragile psychological state coupled with his experimentation with drugs, however, gradually led him into a state of despair. He stopped acting and cut himself off entirely from all his friends, locking himself in an apartment, taking drugs and listening to tapes of his favorite music over and over again. Jia epitomizes the younger generation who, between the late 1980s and early 1990s, went through a radical social change. Rock music, changes in values, and drugs all contributed to a new alienated youth lifestyle. The film recreates seven years of effort by a family to help one of their members get rid of drug addiction and find his identity. Every character in Quitting is played by the real person who was part of Jia Hongsheng's life. The film seeks to be unflinchingly realistic in its portrayal of its characters and the early 1990s as a historical period. Winner of several major international film awards.

ALL SCREENINGS ARE FREE AND TAKE PLACE IN JUDD 302, BEGINNING AT 12:40 PM.
FEEL FREE TO BRING YOUR OWN LUNCH TO EAT WHILE WATCHING THE FILMS!