

**LIST OF CHINESE FILM COMPANIES, FEATURE FILMS,
FILMMAKERS AND FILM ACTORS (1905-1949)**
(Not a complete list)

FILM COMPANIES

- (Fengtai Photo Studio in Beijing, producing the first Chinese film in 1905)
- Shanghai Film Company, set up between 1919-1920
- Mingxing (Ming Hsing or Star) Film Company, set up in 1922
- Minxin (Min Hsin or New People) Film Company, set up in 1923
- Great Wall Film Company, set up in 1924
- Shenzhou (Shen Chou or Wonderful Continent) Film Company, set up in 1924
- Tianyi (Tien Yi or First Under Heaven) Film Company, set up in 1925
- Lianhua (Lien Hua or United China) Film Company, set up in 1930
- Yihua Film Studio, set up in 1933
- Kunlun Film Company, set up in 1947
- Northeast Film Studio, set up in 1949

FEATURE FILMS

- *CONQUER THE JUN MOUNTAIN* (or *DINGJUN MOUNTAIN*, 1905, the first Chinese filmed Peking opera episode)
- *THE DIFFICULT COUPLE* (or *WEDDING NIGHT*, 1913, the first Chinese fictional film)
- *ROMANCE OF A FRUIT PEDDLER* (or *LOVE'S LABOR*, 1922)
- *THE BURNING OF RED LOTUS TEMPLE* (1928)
- *SONGSTRESS RED PEONG* (*SINGSONG GIRL RED PEONG*, 1930, the first Chinese sound film)
- *VOLCANO IN THE BLOOD* (1932)
- *RAGING TORRENTS* (or *WILD TORRENT*, 1933)
- *SMALL TOYS* (or *LITTLE TOYS*, 1933)
- *24 HOURS OF SHANGHAI* (1933)
- *THREE MODERN GIRLS* (1933)
- *DAWN OVER THE METROPOLIS* (1933)
- *SPRING SILKWORMS* (1933)
- *SONG OF THE FISHERMEN* (1934)
- *A BIBLE FOR DAUGHTERS* (or *A BIBLE FOR GIRLS*, 1934)
- *THE GODDESS* (1934)
- *NEW WOMEN* (1934)
- *THE BIG ROAD* (or *THE HIGHWAY*, 1934)
- *PLUNDER OF PEACH AND PLUM*
(or *FATE OF THE COLLEGE GRADUATES*, 1934)

- *BOATMAN'S DAUGHTER* (1935)
- *UNCHANGED HEART IN LIFE AND DEATH* (or *LIFE AND DEATH*, 1936)
- *BLOOD ON WOLF MOUNTAIN* (or *BRAVE HUNTERS*, 1936)
- *LIANHUA SYMPHONY* (1937)
- *NEW YEAR COIN* (1937)
- *CROSSROADS* (1937)
- *TEARS OF A MOTHER* (1937)
- *STREET ANGEL* (1937)
- *EIGHT THOUSAND LI OF CLOUD AND MOON* (1947)
- *SPRING RIVER FLOWS EAST* (or *TEARS OF THE YANGTSE*, 1947)
- *LONG LIVE THE MISSUS* (1947)
- *ALONG THE SUNGARI RIVER* (1947)
- *LIGHTS OF TEN THOUSAND HOMES* (or *MYRIAD OF LIGHTS*, 1948)
- *NIGHT LODGING* (or *THE HOTEL*, 1948)
- *BRIGHT DAY* (1948)
- *MARTYR OF THE PEAR ORCHARD* (or *STORY OF "HALF-WIT"*, 1949)
- *BRIDGE* (1949)
- *CROWS AND SPARROWS* (1949)
- *DAUGHTERS OF CHINA* (1949)

FILMMAKERS

- Zhang Shichuan (Chang Shih-chuan, 1890-1954, director, producer)
- Zheng Zhengqiu (Cheng Chen-chiu, 1889-1935, writer, director, actor)
- Hong Shen (Hung Shen, 1894-1955, scenarist, director, actor)
- Ouyang Yuqian (Ouyang Yu-chien, 1889-1962, writer, director)
- Tian Han (T'ien Han, 1898-1968, writer, director)
- Shi Dongshan (Shih Tung-shan, 1902-1955, director)
- Sun Yu (Sun Yu, 1900-1990, scenarist, director)
- Xia Yen (Hsia Yen, 1900-1995, scenarist, administrator, producer, leader of the Left-wing Film Team in Shanghai during the 1930s)
- Cai Chusheng (Tsai Chu-sheng, 1906-1968, director)
- Shen Xiling (Shen Hsi-ling, 1909-1940, designer, director)
- Jin Shan (Chin Shan, 1911-1982, actor, director, writer)
- Zhen Junli (Cheng Chun-li, 1911-1969, actor, scenarist, director)
- Fei Mu (Fei Mu, 1906-1951, director)
- Bu Wancang (Pu Wan-chang, 1903-1974, scenarist, director)
- Sang Hu (Sang Hu, 1916- , director)
- Shen Fu (Shen Fu, 1905- 1994, scenarist, director)
- Shui Hua (Shui Hua, 1916- , scenarist, director)
- Situ Huimin (Ssutu Hui-min, 1910- 1987, director, producer, administrator)
- Tang Xiaodan (Tang Hsiao-tan, 1910- , director)
- Yang Hansheng (Yang Han-sheng, 1902- 1993, scenarist)
- Ying Yunwei (Ying Yun-wei, 1904- 1967, director)
- Huang Zuolin (1906-1994)
- Cheng Bugao (1893-1966)

FILM ACTORS & ACTRESSES

- Hu Die (Hu Tieh or Miss Butterfly Wu, 1908-1989, actress)
- Wang Renmei (Wang Ren-mei, 1914-1987, actress)
- Li Lili (Lily Lee, 1915- , actress)
- Ruan Lingyu (Ruan Ling-yu, 1910-1935, actress)
- Zhao Dan (Chao Tan, 1915- 1980, actor)
- Bai Yang (Pai Yang, 1920-1997?, actress)
- Zhang Ruifang (Chang Jui-fang, 1918- , actress)
- Qin Yi (Chin Yi, 1922- , actress)
- Xie Tian (Hsieh Tien, 1914- , actor, director)
- Shi Hui (Chih Hui, 1915-1957, actor, director)
- Shu Xiuwen (Shu Hsi-wen, 1915-1969, actress)
- Sun Daolin (Sun Tao-lin, 1921- , actor, director)
- Tao Jin (Tao Chin, 1916-1981, actor, director)
- Wang Danfeng (Wang Tan-feng, 1925- , actress)
- Wei Heling (Wei Ho-ling, 1904-1979, actor, scenarist, director)
- Yu Lan (Yu Lan, 1921- , actress, administrator)
- Wang Yunlong (1903-1969, actor)
- Wang Xianzhai (1898-1942, actor)
- Liu Qiong (1913- , actor)
- Guan Hongda (1914-1967, actor)
- Qi Mengshi (1924- , actor)
- Zheng Shaoqiu (1910-1989, actor)
- Yuan Muzhi (1909-1978, actor)
- Yuan Maiyun (1917- , actress)
- Gu Yelu (1916- , actor)
- Yin Mingzhu (1904- , actress)
- Gao Zhanfei (1904-1969, actor)
- Huang Zongying (1925- , actress)
- Han Langeng (1919-1982, actor)
- Han Fei (1919-1985, actor)
- Tong Zhilin (1922- , actor)
- Lan Ma (1915-1976, actor)
- Li Zhuozhuo (1905- , actress)

(Prepared by Wang Rui for the reference of the students only)

Monument to the Birthplace of Chinese Film

At the end of the 19th century, film was introduced to China, which aroused the great interest of visionaries in this new artistic form.

In the autumn of 1905, the documentary film DINGJUN MOUNTAIN (DING JUN SHAN) shot acrobatic fighting segments from the Peking Opera of the same name. It was produced by Fengtai Photo-studio, located at the temple of the village god in the Liulichang area of Beijing, and then screened in Daganlou Theatre (now Daganlou Cinema), at Dashilan in Qianmen area, Beijing. At that moment, Chinese film was formally born.

Beijing's Fengtai Photo-studio and Daganlou Theatre were both established by national entrepreneur Ren Qingtai. Styled "Jingfeng," he was born in 1850 at Faku County in Liaoning Province, and passed away in 1930 at the age of eighty. The film DINGJUN MOUNTAIN was produced to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of the famous Peking Opera artist Tan Xinpei. Thereafter, Ren Qingtai produced documentary films of segments of Peking Operas, namely LEOPARD, GREEN ROCKY HILL, THE SUNNY MANSION, AT THE WHITE BEACH, and CAPTURE GUANSHENG in succession. These films were warmly received by a wide audience, according to historical records: "The whole town turned out to see the film". For this, Ren Qingtai was known as the pioneer and founder of Chinese film. As the birthplace of Chinese film, Beijing's Daganlou Cinema witnessed the hundred-year development of Chinese film and its brilliant achievements.

This Monument is dedicated to the memory of these people, places and events.

State Administration of Radio, Film & Television

People's Government of Beijing Municipality

December, 2005



Cheng the Fruit Seller (1922)

Cheng the Fruit Seller

aka *Labourer's Love* (Zhi guo yuan,
aka Laogong aiqing)

dir. **Zhang Shichuan**

sc. **Zheng Zhengqiu**

with Zheng Zhegu, Yu Ying, Zheng Zhengqiu
Shanghai: Mingxing Film, 1922

The earliest existing Chinese film, this slapstick **comedy** depicts a fruit seller who devises an ingenious trick to help a doctor win back his patients and who, as a result, can marry the doctor's daughter. The film opens with Cheng attending to his fruit stand, which faces the doctor's small clinic across the street. Cheng expresses his desire for the doctor's daughter by sending her fruit. He even overpowers a couple of hooligans and rescues his sweetheart from danger. However, he has to meet the doctor's condition – making the clinic prosperous – before his marriage proposal can be approved.

Cheng has a sleepless night and comes up with an idea. The second floor of his apartment building is a nightclub where people meet for drinking and gambling parties. Using his carpentry skills, he transforms the stairway into a moveable slide. When the nightclub guests leave, they fall

from the top of the stairs and injure themselves. One by one, they go to the doctor for treatment. The doctor collects a huge pile of money and agrees to let the fruit seller marry his daughter.

Cheng the Fruit Seller is one of many film projects on which Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu collaborated in the 1920s. It reveals the close links between **theatre and film** in modern China.

Further reading

X. He (1982), an account of Mingxing Company by Zhang Shichuan's widow; Z. Zhang (1999), a critical study of the film.

Song of China

aka *Filial Piety* (Tianlun)

dir. **Luo Mingyou**

sc. Zhong Shigen

with **Zheng Junli, Chen Yanyan, Lin Chuchu,**
Zhang Yi, Li Zhuozhuo

Shanghai: Lianhua Film, 1935

This film constitutes one of Lianhua's attempts to participate in the New Life Movement which, among other things, sought to re-establish traditional moral tenets. The film was one of the few Chinese productions to be distributed in the USA during the 1930s.

A wandering son returns home just before his father dies. The old man asks his son to extend his love for the **family** to the whole of society. Several decades later, the son has himself become an old man who is disappointed with his children, particularly his son and daughter-in-law who indulge themselves in the pleasures of city life. He moves his family to the countryside and devotes himself to the building of an orphanage. But after his son and daughter-in-law leave him, his daughter also runs away.

Many years later, the old man's grandson comes to live with him. His daughter, having been abandoned by her lover, also returns home. On his death bed, the old man admonishes his children in terms similar to those used by his father to admonish him years earlier: 'Go beyond personal love and extend love to all mankind.' The film ends with orphans proudly marching to their bright future.



桃花泣血记

THE PEACH GIRL

牧场主之子德恩与牧场管家之女琳姑两小无猜。长大成人后，德恩有意娶天生丽质的琳姑为妻，一对情人陶醉在幸福之中。德恩之母以门第有别为由从中作梗，德恩只得私建新房，谎称其母已同意，与琳姑过起了夫妻生活。事情终于败露，琳姑被赶回乡下，德恩被关在家中。连遭不幸的琳姑贫病交加，卧床不起。弥留之际，德恩终于夺门而出，与她见上了最后一面。

De En was a son of a herd owner. Lin Gu was a daughter of the owner's manager. They were innocent playmates in their childhood. When they grew up, De En wanted to marry the beautiful Lin Gu. The pair of lovers were intoxicated with joy and happiness. Unfortunately, De En's mother stopped them because of Lin Gu's low family status. De En built a new house somewhere in the city in secret, and lied to Lin Gu that his mother had agreed to their marriage. They lived together happily. But the secret was brought to light in the end. Lin Gu was driven out from the house while De En was locked up at home by his mother. Lin Gu went to stay in the countryside. After suffering a series of misfortunes, she became critically ill. When she was dying, De En forced open the door of the room where he was locked up and rushed out to the countryside just in time to see his beloved for the last time.

中国 1931 默片 (英文字幕)

黑白 10本

联华影业公司出品

编导：卜万苍

摄影：黄绍芬

主演：阮玲玉 金焰

China 1931 Silent (English intertitles) B&W 10Reels

Lianhua Film Company

W/D: Bu Wancang

Ph.: Huang Shaofen

L.P.: Ruan Lingyu, Jin Yan

Goddess

(Shennü)

dir./sc. **Wu Yonggang**

with **Ruan Lingyu**, Zhang Zhizhi, Li Keng
Shanghai: Lianhua Film, 1934

A Shanghai prostitute tries to free herself from a greedy, evil pimp. She confronts not only this violent man who takes all her money and keeps her subject to his will, but also an oppressive society that discriminates against her child.

A school principal is the only person willing to help her out. He agrees to allow her child to attend his school, but the objections from parents grow so strong that he has to resign his position upon the child's expulsion. The prostitute decides to leave the city and start over again somewhere else. When she realizes that her pimp has stolen all her savings to pay for his gambling habit, she kills him with a wine bottle. She is arrested and sentenced to twelve years in prison. However, this tragic ending is lightened by her subsequent meeting in her cell with the principal, who promises to take care of her son.

Goddess contains one of Ruan Lingyu's greatest performances. Using **prostitution** as a symbol of oppression and victimization, the film is regarded as a classic of the silent Chinese cinema, comparable to the best contemporary films from the West.

Conquering Jun Mountain

aka *Dingjun Mountain* (Ding Junshan)

dir./sc. unknown

Beijing: Fengtai Photography, 1905

This filmed stage performance was the first film ever made in China by Chinese filmmakers and demonstrated the close link between **theatre and film** in China. The segment of Beijing opera is based on a real historical event that took place during the Three Kingdoms period (AD 220–80).

The King of Wei, Cao Cao, launches an attack against the neighbouring state of Shu, spearheaded by General Zhang He. However, using Prime Minister Zhu Geliang's strategies, the general in charge of Shu's defence, Huang Zhong, defeats Zhang in a counter-attack. After taking one of Cao's supply depots, Shu's army wins a total victory after a final showdown with Cao's invading forces at Jun Mountain.

Sing-Song Girl Red Peony

(Genü Hongmudan)

dir. **Zhang Shichuan**

sc. **Hong Shen**

with **Hu Die**, Wang Xianzai, Xia Peizhen,

Gong Jianong

Shanghai: Mingxing Film, 1930

Sing-Song Girl Red Peony is renowned as one of the first sound films to be produced in China. It was a box-office success and was remade in the 1940s.

Although sing-song girl Red Peony is married to an abusive husband, traditional teaching about woman's virtue dictates that she stays with him no matter what. As a well-known actress, Red Peony brings home a respectable income, but it is never enough to keep up with her husband's extravagant spending. After the cumulative effects of depression damage her voice, she gradually fades from the spotlight. Meanwhile, her husband continues to squander the money away and cause problems for the family. After one of his attempts to sell their daughter is thwarted by Red Peony, he tricks his daughter into going to a brothel and manages to sell her to the brothel owner. One of Red Peony's suitors learns of this and brings her daughter back home after paying a huge sum of money. At the same time, Red Peony's husband is arrested on an involuntary manslaughter charge. Despite all that he has done, Red Peony forgives him and visits him in prison before going on a performance tour. She even appeals to her friends to lobby for her husband's early release. Finally, her husband's conscience is awakened and he reforms himself.

Big Road

(Dalu)

dir. / sc. **Sun Yu**

with **Jin Yan, Zheng Junli**, Han Lan'gen,

Li Lili, Chen Yanyan

Shanghai: Lianhua Film, 1934

This silent film, with added soundtrack, is set during the time of the resistance war against the Japanese invasion. Six young male workers and two waitresses in a roadside restaurant experience a political awakening when they participate in the construction of a strategically important road for the Chinese army. They have different characters and come from different social backgrounds. Jin is an optimist in spite of his miserable childhood; Zhang is melancholic and solitary; Luo is a romantic dreamer; Zheng, a student fleeing Manchuria after the Japanese occupation, is an intellectual type; Zhangda is characterized by his physical strength; Xiaoliu used to be a petty thief, but he is redeemed by his friends. As for the two waitresses, Dingxiang is shy and looks up to Moli, who is aggressive and resourceful.

Dingxiang falls in love with Luo, while Moli prefers to remain friends with all six workers. Meanwhile, the Japanese get closer. A rich local landlord betrays the Chinese resistance force by trying to slow down road construction. When they oppose him, he imprisons and tortures them. Thanks to Moli and Dingxiang, they escape and go back to work. The road is finally completed, but Moli and the six workers die in a Japanese bombing. As the only survivor of the group, Dingxiang dreams that her friends are revived and march ahead.

Big Road is a representative work of leftist film of the 1930s which promotes patriotic and socialist ideals. Since its release, the film and its added theme song by **Nie Er**, 'The Song of the Big Road', have enjoyed lasting popularity.

Zhang Shichuan

b. 1 January 1889, Ningbo, Zhejiang province

d. 8 July 1953

Director, producer

One of the founding fathers of Chinese cinema, Zhang used to work as a comrade for an advertising agency. In 1913, two Americans formed Asia Film Company and asked Zhang to be their advisor. Zhang took over all work responsibilities for the company instead. Though having little experience in filmmaking, he enlisted **Zheng Zhengqiu**, a famous dramatist of the time, and together they made the first Chinese short feature, *The Difficult Couple* (1913). After finishing the film, Zhang formed Huanxian Film Company (Fantasy) in 1916 and directed *Wronged Ghosts in Opium Den* (1916). In 1922, Zhang co-founded Mingxing Film Company with his friends **Zhou Jianyun** and Zheng Zhengqiu.

A shrewd businessman primarily concerned with profit, Zhang differed from Zheng, who viewed cinema as a vehicle for social reform. If their didactic films such as *Orphan Rescues Grandfather* (1923) could become box-office hits, Zhang didn't have a problem with repeating the formula. But when his **martial arts film** *The Burning of Red Lotus Temple* (1928) sold well, Zhang rushed to make sequel after sequel.

In the early 1930s, increasing Japanese aggression against China produced a sense of national crisis. Under Zhang's management, Mingxing hired a group of leftist writers to work for its script department. As a result, a large number of leftist films were produced by the studio.

The Mingxing studio site was destroyed by a Japanese bombardment during the 1932 battle of Shanghai. While Zhang managed to rescue some equipment and film stock, he was never again able to revive Mingxing's former glory. After the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Japanese took over Shanghai and incorporated all of the city's major film studios into the China United Film Production Corporation. Zhang served as a branch manager as well as director of the production department, duties which led to charges of treason after Japan surrendered in 1945. Although not officially indicted, Zhang never recovered from the resulting public humiliation. He died in 1953, aged sixty four.

Zheng Zhengqiu

(Zheng Fangze, Zheng Bo Chang,
Zheng Yao Feng)

b. 25 January 1889, Shanghai

d. 16 July 1935, Shanghai

Screen writer, director, playwright

One of the founding fathers of Chinese cinema, Zheng Zhengqiu was an influential figure in theatre and wrote theatrical reviews for major newspapers. In 1913, his friend **Zhang Shichuan** joined Asia Film Company and asked him to be his partner. Together they made China's first short feature, *The Difficult Couple* (dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1913), a film highly critical of the practice of arranged marriage. However, Asia Film Company dissolved soon after the film was completed, and the two did not work together again until 1922, when Zhang organized Mingxing Film Company. Besides writing and directing, Zheng also served as assistant manager of the studio and was in charge of training company employees.

Zheng always believed that film should be socially conscious and morally uplifting. Between 1923 and 1930 he wrote and directed a total of fifty-three titles, the best known of which are *Cheng the Fruit Seller* (1922), *Orphan Rescues Grandfather* (1923, both dir. Zhang Shichuan), *Little Darling* (1926), *My Fair Lady* (1927), *The White Cloud Pagoda* (1928), *Flower of Freedom* (1932) and *Twin Sisters* (1933). One consistent theme in all these films is the plight of the poor and powerless. Zheng once commented on his films, 'To seek justice on behalf of the weak has always been my philosophy. In my films I have always tried to find a position from which I can speak for the poor'. Indeed, many of his films denounce the moral corruption of those in power. For instance, his most important title of the 1930s, *Twin Sisters*, contrasts the lives of two sisters: while the one married to a wealthy warlord is mean and cruel, the one who works as a maid to support her husband and child is kind and loving. This critical thrust in Zheng's films mirrored the ideological orientation of the 1930s leftists.

Zheng suffered from chronic illness, a condition only exacerbated by his manic work rate. When he died in 1935, a deep sense of loss was felt by both the leftist filmmakers and the KMT officials. In death as in life, Zheng Zhengqiu transcended political differences.

Bu Wancang

b. 1903

d. 1974

Director, producer

One of the leading directors of the 1920s–40s, Bu Wancang began his apprenticeship in 1921 under an American cinematographer employed by

China Film Company. He became a cameraman himself and worked first for Great China Film Company and then for Mingxing Film Company. He participated in the filming of *The Human Heart* (dir. Gu Kenfu, Chen Shouyin, 1924) and *The New Family* (dir. Ren Jinping, 1925), both box-office successes. By 1926, Bu was both producer and director at Mingxing, his directorial debut being *Innocence* (1926).

After joining Lianhua Film Company in 1931, Bu firmly established his reputation by directing such successful titles as *Love and Responsibility* (1931), *Three Modern Women* and *Motherly Love* (both 1933). When Shanghai became an 'isolated island' in 1937–41, Bu was involved in the production of costume dramas, all of which carry strong elements of **nationalism**. *Mulan Joins the Army* (1939) was based on the life of a legendary patriotic girl who disguised herself as a boy so as to join the army fighting foreign invaders. Ironically, once the Japanese began their occupation of Shanghai's international settlements in 1941, Bu also directed two propaganda films for the Japanese: *Universal Love* (1942) and *The Opium War* (1943). These two titles were denounced by patriotic Chinese as Japanese attempts to justify colonialist policies in China. Such controversy proved damaging to both Bu's political and professional post-war careers. Bu went to Hong Kong in 1948 to work for Yonghua Film Company. He left Yonghua two years later and formed his own Taishan film company. He made a few more films in Taiwan in the early 1960s before retiring.

Wu Yonggang

b. 1 November 1907, Jiangsu province

d. 18 December 1982

Director

A famous director of the 1930s, Wu Yonggang began working with film at the age of nineteen. His father did not think highly of the medium and encouraged him to study fine arts at the Commercial Press. However, Wu found employment at Lily (Baihe) Film Company and was soon discovered by **Shi Dongshan**, who promoted him to stage designer.

Wu's directing debut, *Goddess* (1934), a Lianhua Film Company production, was well received by both critics and audiences. He next directed *Little Angel* (1935), which was based on a prize-winning screenplay. Although his name is often associated with leftist films, Wu was a socially conscious artist in broader terms. In *The Desert Island* (1936), for example, Wu searched for a common humanism that could unite people, and he lamented the divisions brought about by class consciousness. Yet when it came to foreign encroachments against China, Wu was a staunch nationalist. In the patriotic *The Pioneers* (1936), Wu advocated unity among the Chinese and armed resistance against foreign invaders.

Wu's films became more diverse during the period 1937–41. There were entertaining action flicks, costume dramas and romantic tearjerkers. Eventually, Wu went to Chongqing, where he worked for Nationalist Central Film Studio and began to film *The Path to National Reconstruction*. However, the project ran into problems. First, the original female lead, **Hu Die**, had to be replaced because of Hu's entangled relationship with Dai Li, head of the Nationalist secret police. Then the crew became caught up in a Japanese bombing raid during location shooting and lost most of its footage and equipment. The project was finally aborted. After the war, Wu directed several noteworthy films, including *Loyal Family* (1946) and *Decision of a Lifetime* (1947). He also founded Daye Film Company and produced *Waiting for Spring* (1947).

During the 1950s Wu directed three films: *The Far Away Village* (1950) deals with land reform, *Hasen and Fiamila* (1952) tackles issues of ethnicity, and *Qiu Meets the Goddess of Flowers* (1956) is a fairy tale. In 1957 Wu wrote an essay criticizing the party's excessive control over the film industry. He

was labelled a Rightist and deprived of any opportunity to direct more films. (He was not able to make another film until 1962.) Wu made two popular, politically 'safe' opera movies. In the post-**Cultural Revolution** period, he directed the highly acclaimed *Night Rain on the River* (co-dir. **Wu Yigong**, 1980), which won Best Film award at the 1981 China GRA. Wu Yonggang then retired from filmmaking.

Fei Mu

b. 1906, Shanghai

d. 1951

Director

Acclaimed as one of the most accomplished of all Chinese directors, Fei Mu spent his childhood in Beijing. After graduating from a French school, Fei worked as an accountant for a mining company in Hebei province. Besides his knowledge of French, Fei was self-taught in English, German, Russian and Italian. Before being hired as chief editor for the information department of North China Film Company in 1930, Fei contributed film reviews to numerous newspapers and journals in Beijing. He also co-published, with **Zhu Shilin**, a film magazine entitled *Hollywood* (Haolaiwu).

Fei moved to Shanghai in 1932 where he was offered a position as director by Lianhua Film Company. His critically acclaimed debut, *City Night* (1933), concerns class tensions between workers and capitalists and exhibits an unmistakable sympathy for the working poor. Following this success, Fei directed *Life* and *A Nun's Love* (both 1934). His ***Song of China*** (aka *Filial Piety*, co-dir. **Luo Mingyou**, 1935) glorified traditional family values and was intended to help promote the ideology of the New Life Movement. The film was taken to the USA and re-edited for a limited release. Fei proceeded to *Wolf Hunting* (1936), a film that deals implicitly with the increasing Japanese aggression against China. Fei's last film, ***Spring in a Small Town*** (1948), presents its triangular love story with great conceptual and technical maturity. Many critics consider this film to be one of the best art films produced before 1949, a Chinese equivalent to *Citizen Kane* (dir. Orson Welles, 1941).

Fei suffered from chronic health problems and had very poor eyesight. He died in 1952, three years after moving to Hong Kong and co-founding Longma Film Company with Zhu Shilin and Fei Luyi.



Ruan Lingyu, a tragic star

Ruan Lingyu

(Ruan Agen, Ruan Yuying)

b. 26 April 1910, Shanghai

d. 8 March 1935, Shanghai

Actress

Ruan Lingyu was one of the most accomplished stars of the 1930s. Her tragic death in 1935 and her well-attended public funeral received coverage in major newspapers around the world – a rare event in the film business.

Ruan exhibited her talents at an early age. In 1926, she was recruited by Mingxing Film Company and soon made her first appearance in *Marriage in Name* (dir. **Bu Wancang**, 1927). After starring in four films for Mingxing, she joined Great China - Lily Film Company and made another six titles. Among these, *Amorous Lesson* (dir. **Li Pingqian**, 1929) represents the best of Ruan's early performances.

Ruan joined Lianhua Film Company in 1930 and had an astonishing success with the studio's

first release, *Memories of the Old Capital* (dir. **Sun Yu**, 1930). As a result, Ruan became Lianhua's major asset. She began to expand her range of characters, playing a patriotic worker in *Three Modern Women* (dir. Bu Wancang, 1933), a devoted mother in *Little Toys* (dir. Sun Yu, 1933) and a freelance writer in *New Woman* (dir. **Cai Chusheng**, 1934). Many of Ruan's contemporaries suggested that her superb technical skills grew out of her ability to transform her own life experiences into her character portrayals. Some pointed out the parallels between her own unhappy life and the lives of those she played on-screen. Indeed, throughout her short career, Ruan played rape victims in at least two movies and committed suicide four times. Her characters were often sick, sad, depressed or doomed. Yet people who worked with her remembered Ruan as a talented, easy-going and cooperative colleague.

In contrast to her professional success, Ruan's private life was a series of disasters. Her father died when she was only five. To support the family, Ruan's mother worked as a maid for the Zhang family. Years later, the youngest son of the family, Zhang Damin, became interested in Ruan and proposed marriage. But because Zhang's parents disapproved of the couple's different social standing, the marriage was never made official. Ruan and Damin began to fall out not long after their wedding and soon separated. Without a legal divorce, however, Ruan discovered that when she began to live with her new lover, a wealthy merchant named Tang Jishan, she was technically guilty of adultery – a crime in Chinese law of the time. Zhang tolerated this for a while so long as Ruan paid him off. But when Ruan tried to break with him completely, he pressed charges against her, leading to a ruling obliging Ruan to appear in court. The affair was sensationalized by the newspapers in Shanghai. In despair, Ruan Lingyu committed suicide. When tens of thousands of people attended her funeral procession in the city, even the *New York Times* reported the phenomenon.

In death as in life, Ruan continues to inspire fascination and love. In addition to several TV dramas, a biographical film *The Actress* (dir. Stanley **Kwan**, 1992) attempted to recapture the glamorous lifestyle of 1930s Shanghai.

Jin Yan

(Jin Delin)

b. 8 April 1910

d. 27 December 1983

Actor

One of the most popular stars of the 1930s (nicknamed the 'Chinese Valentino'), Jin Yan was born into a Korean doctor's family in Seoul. Jin's family moved to China in the wake of the Japanese occupation of Korea; Jin took his new name during his school years in Tianjin.

Jin travelled to Shanghai in 1927 and was admitted into Minxin Film Company's training

programme. Within a year he had appeared in two films. By 1929 Jin was playing male lead in several swordplay films. After he joined Lianhua Film Company in 1930, he starred in almost every major production released by the studio. According to a poll conducted by a Shanghai newspaper, Jin was the most popular actor with Shanghai audiences. In fact, he was voted 'King of the Screen' by his fans in 1932.

Among Jin's numerous films are *Wild Flower* (1930), *Big Road* (1934, both dir. **Sun Yu**), *Love and Responsibility* (1931), *Three Modern Women*, *Motherly Love* (both 1933), *The Golden Age* (1934, all dir. **Bu Wancang**), *The New Peach Blossom Fan* (dir. **Ouyang Yuqian**, 1935) and *The Pioneers* (dir. **Wu Yonggang**, 1936). Many of these films were written or directed by leftist filmmakers. Yet despite Jin's association with the leftists – which resulted in physical threats after his name appeared on the blacklist of an ultra-right wing Nationalist group – Jin was merely an artist with a social conscience: he never joined the CCP, not even after the CCP came to power in 1949.

Jin's film career began to go downhill after the Sino-Japanese war broke out in 1937. During an eight year stretch he made only one title, *The Sky Rider* (dir. Sun Yu, 1940), for the Nationalist Central Film Studio. After briefly flirting with his childhood dream of becoming an architect, and a failed attempt at business, Jin returned to Shanghai once the war ended. He starred in three films produced in the city between 1945 and 1949.

Although Jin made a comeback in the 1950s, starring in *The Return of Spring* (dir. Xu Tao, 1950), *The Point of Departure* (dir. Zhang Ke, 1954), *Mother* (dir. **Ling Zifeng**, 1956), and *Eagle in the Storm* (dir. Wang Yi, 1957), his film career was cut short in 1958 by a serious illness. He made no more appearances after that date.