U-M Contemporary Chinese Film Series

ELECTRIC SHADOWS 2014-2017

Sponsored by the U-M Confucius Institute and Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies
Electric Shadows, an Electrifying Event
Contemporary Chinese Film Series 2014 - 2017

Since 2014, CIUM and the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies have cosponsored Electric Shadows, an annual Chinese contemporary film festival. Designed to introduce contemporary Chinese art and culture to U-M and the surrounding community, the film festival entertains audiences with fascinating stories and dazzling cinematic features, revealing diverse facets of life in today’s China. All Electric Shadows movies are selected by film scholars; kudos for their excellent choices! For 2017, Electric Shadows will feature six films, including the critically acclaimed Wolf Totem (2016), a Chinese-French co-production, directed by Jean-Jacque Annaud, and Duckweed (2017), directed by Han Han. We look forward to seeing you at the screening events and to hearing your comments and suggestions for future Electric Shadows films.

- Joseph Lam, Director, U-M Confucius Institute

The University of Michigan’s 4th annual Chinese contemporary film series, Electric Shadows, will be held this October and November featuring six highly acclaimed films. Ann Arbor has a long history of bringing international films to southeast Michigan. For example, last March, the Ann Arbor Film Festival, the oldest experimental film festival in North America, celebrated its 55th anniversary. And more recently, since 2013, Ann Arbor has been home to the Cinetopia Film Festival, which showcases feature-length films from around the world. Adding to this wealth of viewing opportunities, Electric Shadows was launched four years ago with the goal of sharing Chinese popular culture with Ann Arbor and its surrounding communities. The film series is curated by Professor Sangjoon Lee of Nanyang Technological University. For this year’s program, Professor Lee has selected eight contemporary Chinese films that premiered internationally between 2016-2017. Six of them will be screened on Fridays, beginning October 6, 2017. The current film candidates are Duckweed (2017), Xuanzhang (2016), Trivisa (2016), Soul Mate (2016), Wolf Totem (2016), and The Summer is Gone (2016). All film screenings will be held in Angell Hall Auditorium B, and we will have a small reception on the opening day. Please check out CIUM’s website confucius.umich.edu or subscribe to CIUM’s email newsletter to receive up-to-date information about the film series and other exciting CIUM events.

- Jiyoung Lee, Assistant Director, U-M Confucius Institute
Good Stories, Well Told:
China’s Mainstream Cinema and the Matter of Quality

By John Berra, Lecturer, Renmin University of China

On the weekend of December 25, 2015, the two new releases vying for mainland China box office supremacy were Deng Chao’s slapstick comedy Devil and Angel and Guan Hu’s melancholic crime drama Mr. Six. Both films opened well with respective 3-day grosses of $78 million and $39 million, but their subsequent commercial trajectories were indicative of the markedly different levels of quality on display. The critically lambasted Devil and Angel sputtered to a final gross of $99 million; meanwhile, the widely acclaimed Mr. Six demonstrated strong legs, closing with $139 million.

Although these films received reviews at opposite ends of the critical spectrum, it was the online discussion driven by everyday viewers that torpedoed Devil and Angel while giving a deserved boost to Mr. Six. After seeing Devil and Angel, one outraged viewer commented, “I’ve never felt more uncomfortable in a movie theater. As a director, Deng Chao is always fumbling about looking for new lows. His understanding of comedy is to ask viewers to drop their IQ to his level.”1 In comparison, a user who opted for the competing film enthused, “Guan Hu spins a brilliant and affecting tale with Mr. Six.”2 Guan had clearly satisfied an audience appetite for a good story, well told, with a distinctive local flavor. As the prominent Beijing-based film critic Raymond Zhou commented in 2013, “Many well-off people in non-first tier cities have not watched a single film in cinema for years. If they can be attracted to cinemas by high quality films instead of watching pirated DVDs at home, the market can be gigantic.”3

China’s box office continued to grow in 2016, but at a significantly slower rate than in 2015. According to China’s entertainment sector tracking agency, Entgroup, ticket sales hit 45.5 billion yuan, up 4% from the previous year, but when compared to the 48% surge seen in 2015, it is clear that the options on the multiplex menu were not so enticing.4 There are a myriad of reasons for this box office slowdown: China’s economy is slowing down after a decade of exponential growth, the novelty of the movie-going experience is wearing off, and industry regulators have curtailed cheap online ticket promotions. However, the matter of mainstream

quality is certainly a further issue, one that recently prompted a war of words between audiences and the state when People’s Daily took website users to task for undermining the box office performances of a spate of heavily promoted new releases – The Great Wall (Zhang Yimou, 2016), Railroad Tigers (Ding Sheng, 2016), and See You Tomorrow (Zhang Jiajia, 2016) – with comments so negative that they bordered on ridicule.5

Based on the fracas of December 2016, China’s mainstream cinema appears to have a quality problem. On balance, though, such Internet rage can be seen more as a reaction to a sudden slump than a complete dearth of decent films. In fact, the quality of mainstream releases has developed incrementally since the early 2000s, albeit with occasional artistic backsliding, and this essay will survey this aspect of China’s film production since the early 2000s.

A Cinema of Cycles

The sheer pace at which China’s commercial films are churned out today prompts comparison with the nation’s breakneck real estate boom, which relies on a nonstop of construction projects and quick flip deals to sustain its bubble. Indeed, the development of China’s commercial cinema is intertwined with construction as the country boasted 39,194 cinema screens by the end of September 2016.6 These screens need to be filled, a task that local studios, smaller companies, and independent producers seeking to crack the big time are more than up for. However, while China’s economic surge means that its film industry can construct studios like Wanda’s Qingdao Movie Metropolis facility that rival the production resources of Hollywood, it has yet to mature in terms of nurturing material through development. As such, the past ten years have been defined by cycles, with producers using box office hits as templates for their own versions, which are rushed to the multiplex in double-quick time. Ling Jiang traces this methodology of cultural production back to China’s history of having artists learn their craft by copying celebrated works – today, rampant imitation occurs across popular culture, whether movies, literature, or pop music.7

For instance, the wuxia (“martial-chivalric fiction”) phenomenon was started by the global success of Ang Lee’s sumptuous international co-production Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000) and reached its apex with Zhang Yimou’s trilogy of Hero (2002), House of Flying Daggers (2004), and Curse of the Golden Flower


7 Ling Jiang, “Call for Copy - The Culture of Counterfeit in China,” Journal of Chinese Economics, 2, no. 2 (2014), pp. 73-78.
However, all the production value thrown at _The Promise_ (Chen Kaige, 2005) or _The Four_ (Gordon Chan and Janet Chun, 2012) could not prevent these subsequent warrior epics from seeming interchangeable. In 2011, the romantic-comedy boom was instigated by Teng Huatao’s _Love is Not Blind_, in which a young professional (Bai Bahe) receives unexpected support from her co-worker (Wen Zhang) after breaking-up with her boyfriend. It was soon followed by light confections like _Say Yes_ (Leste Chen, 2013), _A Wedding Invitation_ (Ki Hwan Oh, 2013), _Finding Mr. Right_ (Xue Xiaolu, 2013), _Only You_ (Zhang Hao, 2015), and _Finding Mr. Right 2_ (Xue, 2016). In 2012, Xu Zheng’s hilarious fish-out-of-water comedy _Lost in Thailand_ provided a creative jolt with its cross-cultural interplay. The barrage of cheap gags and reductive stereotypes seen in recent travel comedies _Detective Chinatown_ (Chen Sicheng, 2016) and _Buddies in India_ (Wang Baoqiang, 2017) constitutes an inevitable downward trend, although Xu’s _Lost in Hong Kong_ (2015) turned out to be a canny commentary on the mainland’s shifting dynamic with the former British colony. Nostalgic youth dramas, and horror movies have been through similar cycles, with the latter genre being further hindered by censorship restrictions regarding depictions of the supernatural.

**Cultivating Quality**

Amidst all of this copycat activity, China’s film industry has made concentrated efforts to cultivate an environment conducive to the production of high quality mainstream films with the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic of China (SAPPRFT) loosening its opaque guidelines to allow for a measure of social critique. This open-mindedness stemmed from a fear in the early 2000s that increased audience preference for Hollywood films would soon enable the major U.S. studios to swoop in and take over the local market. China’s first ‘commercial art film’ was _Spring Subway_ (2002) which announced the arrival of a new type of entertainment mainly through its sense of style than through its content since its director, Zhang Yibai, came from a pop video background, and Liu Fendou’s screenplay was careful to avoid cutting too deeply when commenting on the sudden social changes brought about by urbanization. A tale of a young married couple in Beijing who are leading increasingly separate lives, _Spring Subway_ illustrated the restlessness that occurs in relationships, even though the eventual message was one of renewal. Zhang followed this up with the spikier _Curiosity Kills the Cat_ (2006), a sleek melodrama that takes an upscale Chongqing residential complex as a metaphoric space to explore China’s capitalization. Shaoyi Sun identified _Curiosity Kills the Cat_ as “proof that China can produce quality contemporary dramas on a par with any other countries, despite the annoying hurdles of censorship.”

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Officials also tried to belatedly integrate the internationally celebrated Sixth Generation filmmakers into the mainstream. Films like *Beijing Bastards* (Zhang Yuan, 1993), *Postman* (He Jianjun, 1995), *Frozen* (Wang Xiaoshuai, 1997), and *Suzhou River* (Lou Ye, 2000) were feted at overseas festivals by audiences eager for uncensored images of the China in an era of transformation, but deemed too politically sensitive to be shown at home. Eventually, though, olive branches were extended. After being a thorn in the side of the film bureau for such portraits of social malaise as *Xiao Wu* (1997) and *Unknown Pleasures* (2002), Jia Zhangke was able to make *The World* (2004) and *Still Life* (2006) with official permission, while Wang Xiaoshuai shot *Shanghai Dream* (2005) as his first approved production after more than a decade underground. The Sixth Generation’s determination to explore the problematic aspects of China’s economic miracle ensured that they could only exist on the periphery of China’s mainstream film market, however liberalized it was becoming.

Instead, the initiative to produce quality mainstream cinema was most beneficial to directors who are adept at working within, or fusing, popular genres. *Kekexili: Mountain Patrol* (Lu Chuan, 2004) is based on the activities of a real-life volunteer group that patrolled the Tibetan Plateau during the 1990s to fend off poachers. However, Chuan used the widescreen canvas to make the film more of a stirring adventure than a case study, with elements of the Western (male bonding, determined tracking, and buzzards picking on carcasses) transposed to the stunning but treacherous landscape of Tibet. *Cow* (Guan Hu, 2009) tells the darkly humorous tale of a bumbling villager (Huang Bo) entrusted to care for a Dutch cow in the midst of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Despite its simple premise, Cow finds Guan walking a risky tightrope between slapstick comedy and an evocation of the horrors of war. *The Dead End* (Cao Baoping, 2015) is a gripping thriller concerning a murder that continues to haunt its perpetrators (Deng Chao and Guo Tao) and principal investigator (Duan Yihong) years later. Cao ensures his convoluted plot is resolved in line with Confucian values, but keeps the audience on edge throughout with tense confrontations and a vertigo-inducing action scene on top of a Xiamen skyscraper.

Social issues have also made their way into mainstream fare with films that have managed to convey a strong message without being didactic. *Caught in the Web* (2012), a rare contemporary-set film by Fifth Generation figurehead Chen Kaige, tracks how a young woman’s life is ruined after footage of her behaving inconsiderately on a public bus goes viral. Although it moves at a fast pace to convey the speed of mobile connectivity, the drama is rooted in character and the ethical dilemmas presented by China’s increasingly plugged-in society. *Dearest* (Peter Chan, 2014) and *Lost and Love* (Peng Sanyuan, 2015) are a pair of dramas dealing with child abduction which were released within a few months of one another. Chan’s film is arguably the more hard-hitting since it is a dramatization of a real-life incident in which the parents of an abducted boy (Huang Bo and Lu
Xiaojuan) finally located their son in a remote village. Peng’s film is a road movie with a determined farmer (Andy Lau) traveling the country in search of his lost son, only to befriend a young car mechanic (Jing Boran) who was abducted as a child and is now searching for his parents. In both, the issue is soberly addressed through emotionally involving storytelling with star names used to attract an audience that may be otherwise deterred by the harrowing subject matter.

**The Quiet Rise of the Middlebrow Indie**

Aside from the efforts of local studios to raise the bar with their releases, China’s mainstream cinema is also receiving low-key assistance from the indie sector. Frequently positioned in direct opposition to commercial production, China’s indie cinema is actually more varied in its aspirations, with many recent productions intended as much for a domestic audience as for the international festival circuit. Sabrina Q. Yu has argued that, “neither indulging in the dark side of the society nor presenting the visual evidence of a corrupted and chaotic country can justify the diverse topics of contemporary Chinese indie films.”

This describes a growing number of China’s indies which take a middlebrow approach, telling stories within genre and providing food for thought without treading into overly sensitive territory, thereby coexisting with studio fare as mainstream option.

The standout mainstream indie title of recent years based on domestic box office performance is undoubtedly *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (Diao Yinan, 2014), a thriller set in Heilongjiang that offers tangled narrative in which a former police detective (Liao Fan) revisits a case from years earlier involving scattered body parts. Diao’s earlier films *Uniform* (2003) and *Night Train* (2007) were neorealist exercises, but *Black Coal, Thin Ice* favors abstraction: the procedural is less rooted in a specific locale with a sense of doomed romanticism hanging in the polluted air and moral decay illustrated through gaudily-lit interiors. Diao also includes wry nods to *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949) with the use of the classic zither theme, a Ferris wheel serving as an intimate space for shocking revelations, and romantic devotion being used to lay a police trap. Coverage of the film’s Golden Bear win at the Berlin Film Festival noted that the film was not overtly political, with Diao instead delivering a crafty genre item rather than a clear statement about China’s societal ills.

Other middlebrow indies of note include *The Piano in a Factory* (Zhang Meng, 2010), a charming comedy-drama that follows the efforts of a broke accordion player (Wang Qian-yuan) to secure custody of his daughter when his ex-wife returns to town with a wealthy new husband in toe. *The Love Songs of Tiedan* (Hao Jie, 2012) mixes striking landscape with bawdy humor by chronicling the dispiriting experiences of a young woman who lives for singing adult-minded folk songs, which provide him and the film itself with their light

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relief. With a title that playfully evokes the spirit of Alfred Hitchcock, *North by Northeast* (Zhang Bingjian, 2014) is a laidback mystery set in the late-1970s with a barely competent police captain (Ban Zan) trying to apprehend a rapist, with assistance coming from an elderly former university professor (Li Bin). Set in the final days of the Cultural Revolution, the film focuses more on community, mining its humor from the slapdash investigative methods of the police, although the professor’s banishment during this tumultuous period of history is alluded to. *The Coffin in the Mountain* (Xin Yukun, 2015) examines how a small community unravels when a corpse is discovered on the outskirts of the village with the ensuing mystery used to navigate a web of provincial issues. Although it is often the case that distributors are ultimately unable to secure sufficient screens to facilitate the breakout success enjoyed by *Black Coal, Thin Ice*, all these films cater to mainstream audiences.

**Leading by Example**

Returning to studio productions, one of the most outspoken critics of the fluctuating quality of China’s mainstream cinema has been the popular auteur Feng Xiaogang, who pioneered the Chinese New Year comedy with *The Dream Factory* (1997), *Be There or Be Square* (1998) and *Sorry Baby* (1999) before moving into drama with *Cell Phone* (2003) and *Aftershock* (2010). In the 1990s, Feng believed in the market, expounding the philosophy that, “Business is first, art is second.”12 By the 2000s, Feng felt that the time for art had come and has since used his clout as China’s box office king to publicly chastise the industry for a lack of quality.13 Two of Feng’s recent successes demonstrate the kind of richly rewarding mainstream entertainment that Chinese cinema can produce when proper attention is paid to all the necessary details.

In addition to his usual roles as director and producer, Feng is also an occasional actor and played the title role in the aforementioned *Mr. Six*, the story of a former gangster who now spends his days skating on a frozen lake while listening to radio dramas, only to get back in the game when his son is kidnapped by a drag racing gang. Leisurely paced in its first half, *Mr. Six* confidently involves the audience in its milieu, establishing the neighborhood credentials of its protagonist through a series of interactions before pitting him against the insolent young pretenders, who are representative of China’s fuerdai (second generation rich). Less than a year later, Feng unveiled his most

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recent directorial outing, *I Am Not Madame Bovary* (2016), a caustic satire of bureaucracy concerning a villager (Fan Bingbing, cast strikingly against type) who travels to Beijing to take her scheming ex-husband to court after he tricks her into a divorce. Feng’s style choices challenge his audience as much as his leading lady since he employs methods of distancing. The story is shown through a circular shape in the rural sections, limiting Fan’s movements, then a square once she reaches the city, suggesting a larger world, but also one defined by restrictions.

*Mr. Six* and *I Am Not Madame Bovary* are superbly crafted mainstream entertainment that crucially respect the increased sophistication of China’s cinemagoers, who by this juncture have not only been exposed to local films, but to a flood of Hollywood imports, and classics from various territories that are easily found on DVD or online. While achieving a consistent level of quality in mainstream releases is still a pressing matter for the cinema of mainland China, the talents of its more ambitious filmmakers and the engagement of its passionate audience will hopefully result in a steady stream of good stories, well told.

**Bio**

John Berra is a lecturer in Film and Language Studies at Renmin University of China. He is the co-editor of *World Film Locations: Beijing* (Intellect, 2012) and *World Film Locations: Shanghai* (2014). He is the co-editor of the *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* and has contributed to *Electric Shadows: A Century of Chinese Cinema* (BFI, 2015).
Nobody can deny the global significance of contemporary Chinese cinema and its growing audience. China has the fastest growing film market in the world, passing Japan in 2012 to become the second largest in gross box office revenue. The film market in China has been growing at an annual rate of more than 30 percent in the last half decade. Most industry experts and market analysts now safely predict that the size of the Chinese film market will surpass the size of North America’s in 2018. Filmmakers and producers around the world have been increasingly looking to China for opportunities to expand their audience and to find new co-production partners. Chinese media conglomerates have also been recruiting regional talents, particularly technicians, performers, and creative personnel, and buying out film and media companies, theatres, and TV stations in the region and beyond. Together with the Chinese film market’s leapfrog development in the past decade, high-quality Chinese films have flowed outward to global film markets to connect with international audiences through commercial cinemas, art theatres, international film festivals, and digital platforms. High-profile film directors such as Zhang Yimou, Feng Xiaogang, Jia Zhangke, Lou Ye, Lu Chuan, and Wang Bing have become household names in contemporary world cinema. In the last decade, Chinese cinemas has become among the most vibrant cinemas in the world.

Sponsored by the Confucius Institute and Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan, Electric Shadows: Contemporary Chinese Film Series 2017 will look at six highly rated Chinese films produced in 2016 and 2017. By screening mainstream, art-house, and independent favourites, this series will show many faces of modern Chinese cinema. The mainstream selections—Duckweed, Wolf Totem, and Xuanzang represent Chinese cinema’s current efforts to diversify genres, markets, and artistic approaches. Han Han’s father-son reconciliation drama, Duckweed, with two mega-stars Deng Chao and Eddie Peng, was the surprise hit of 2017 Chinese New Year (CNY). Yet, the film is not a typical CNY film. Critic Maggie Lee (Variety) praised the film, describing it as “sprinkled with witty grace notes... crowd-pleasing without being too ingratiating or idiotic.” Traditionally, CNY films have largely been dominated by wuxiapian (sword-fighting dramas, all’s-well-that-ends-well) comedies, Jacky Chan action-comedy cycles, and mega-budget historical epics. But Duckweed, a heart-warming drama, shows that the industry is tapping into a market of increasingly sophisticated new moviegoers. On the other hand, Wolf Totem and Xuanzang are both big-budget bicultural extravaganzas. Wolf Totem is directed by a renowned French filmmaker, Jean-Jacques Annaud, and Xuanzang is the first Sino-Indian collaboration between state-owned China Film Corporation and Eros International in India. Xuanzang follows its eponymous character, a Buddhist monk, as he travels from China to India during the Tang dynasty. It was selected as the Chinese entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards in 2017.
Duckweed, Wolf Totem, and Xuanzang are all transnational in their production, geographical scope, financial investments, and potential markets. Indeed, Chinese cinema has always been transnational, reflecting the broad geography of Chinese culture, as it exists in the People’s Republic of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and regions across the world that are home to the Chinese diasporas. From this perspective, two medium-budget films, Soul Mate and Trivisa – produced by Hong Kong filmmaking veterans – were chosen to reflect the transnational nature of the Chinese film industry. The films raise questions of cultural identity and sovereignty within Hong Kong’s dramatically changing political landscape (Trivisa) and provide a subtle but provocative story of female friendship that portrays a fascinating look into contemporary China’s two mega-cities, Shanghai and Beijing (Soul Mate). Trivisa and Soul Mate have both won major awards. Trivisa, produced by Johnnie To’s Milkyway Image, won all five awards at the 36th Hong Kong Film Awards, including for best film and best director. Soul Mate, meanwhile, won the best actress award at the 53rd Taipei Golden Horse Film Awards.

The only art-house and independent film in the Electric Shadows series, The Summer Is Gone is a beautifully-shot black-and-white film. It focuses on a boy and his family living in a small town in western China during the early 1990s. As film critic Clarence Tsui wrote, “The Summer Is Gone is a lush and melancholic ode about the end of an era” when the mainland was experiencing huge changes brought about by economic reforms.

China’s film industry is experiencing great transformation, and yet there are many challenges related to production quality, revenue, and the need to attract viewers in an industry where Hollywood remains powerful and popular. But Chinese cinema is, without doubt, one of the most dynamic in the world today. The films offered by Electric Shadows will give us some clues about where contemporary Chinese cinema is heading.

Bio
Duckweed (2017) 乘风破浪 – 7 PM, October 6
Directed by Han Han

This “dramedy” casts two megastars: Deng Chao and Eddie Peng. Maggie Lee Variety praised the film as being “sprinkled with witty grace notes and crowd-pleasing without being too ingratiating or idiotic.” In this time-traveling crime film, a son attempts to reconcile with his father while he travels time back to the year 1998, when his estranged father was young. (Mandarin with English subtitles)

The Summer is Gone (2016) 八月 – 7 PM, October 13
Directed by Dalei Zhang

A lush and melancholic ode about the end of an era, a boy spending his last vacation before enrolling in the local junior high, and for a community confronting the changes brought about by the privatization of state-backed enterprises from which they had long earned their stable living. (Mandarin with English subtitles)

Trivisa (2016) 树大招风 – 7 PM, October 20
Directed by Jevons Au, Vicky Wong, and Frank Hui

A low budget independent crime thriller, produced by Johnnie To and directed by three young Hong Kong producers, received multiple prestigious awards from the Golden Horse Awards and the 36th Hong Kong Film Awards. This fictional film about three notorious real-life Hong Kong mobsters is set during the time of the territory’s handover to China. (Cantonese with English subtitles)
Soul Mate (2016) 七月与安生 – 7 PM, October 27
Directed by Derek Tsang

This film tells a female-centric story about two young girls from the coming-of-age and tragi-romance traditions. Model student Qiyue and free-spirited Ansheng are best friends, forming their inseparable bond from the moment they met as children. Soon their loyalties are put to the test when a boy and the cruelties of youth lead them down separate paths. Years later, a web novella based on their lives surfaces, forcing Ansheng to confront the decade of memories shared between her and Qiyue, and ultimately uncovering a deep secret. (Mandarin with English subtitles)

Xuanzang (2016) 大唐玄奘 – 7 PM, November 3
Directed by Huo Jianqi

During the Tang Dynasty’s era of “Zhen Guan,” the young Xuan Zang monk, in his quest for Buddhist knowledge, embarked on a journey to India that was fraught with peril. Soldiers got in his way. His disciples betrayed him. He struggled through deserts and ran out of food and water. He observed the suffering of common people—all in the quest of Buddha’s teachings. He finally arrives in India, and studies Buddhism in earnest. By the time he returns to China, he is 50 years old. (Mandarin with English subtitles)

Wolf Totem (2016) 狼图腾 – 7 PM, November 10
Directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud

An adaptation of Jiang Rong’s semi-autobiographical novel, this wildlife drama is centered around a man who embraces the spirit of the Mongolian wolf. In 1967, a young Beijing student, Chen Zhen, is sent to live among the nomadic herdsmen of Inner Mongolia. Caught between the advance of civilization from the south and the nomads’ traditional enemies—the marauding wolves—to the north, humans and animals, residents and invaders alike, struggle to find their true place in the world. (Mandarin with English subtitles)
What Women Want (2011) 我知女人心
In a Beijing advertising agency, an arrogant, narcissistic executive, played by Andy Lau, has a fated freak accident, which gives him a very special gift of being able to read women’s thoughts. He misuses his new gift to cheat and promote himself, but he realizes that he is falling in love with his competitor.

Young Detective Dee (2013) 年轻侦探
Working in his first case at the Imperial police force, Detective Dee investigates reports of a sea monster terrorizing the town and reveals a sinister conspiracy of treachery and betrayal, leading to the highest reaches of the Imperial family.

Journey to the West (2013) 西游记
Xuan Zang, a mop-topped monk in 16th century China, aspires to be a demon hunter. When a village is besieged by a fishing demon, Xuan intercedes and attempts to “coax the goodness out of him,” but his method proves less effective than that of Miss Duan, who pummels the creature into submission and sends Xuan off in search of “enlightenment.”

Finding Mr. Right (2013) 找到权利先生
The female protagonist, Jiajia, is pregnant with a married man in Beijing. She flies to Seattle to have her child at an illegal maternity center as a way of avoiding scandal and obtaining American citizenship for the child. During her time at the maternity center, she meets Frank, a single dad, and his daughter, and falls in love with them.

The Grandmaster (2013) 大师
An epic action film inspired by the life and times of the legendary kung fu master, Ip Man. The story spans China’s last dynasty, a time of chaos, division and war that was also the golden age of Chinese martial arts.

American Dreams in China (2013) 美国梦在中国
A comedy drama that traces the two-decade journey of three friends, from their humble university days to becoming the co-founders of a successful English school. The story is based on a real English education institute in China. Director Peter Chan integrates some of his own experiences as a foreign student in the United States into the film.

Police Story (2014) 新警察故事
This newest version of Police Story has a darker tone, whereas the previous Police Story films were more comedic. Police Captain Zhong Wen knows all about sacrifice. He’s always been too busy chasing bad guys to be a father to his daughter Miao. Tonight, he’s seeing her for the first time in years and meeting her fiance, club owner Wu Jiang.

Aberdeen (2014) 香港仔
The extended Cheng family, which, like Aberdeen harbor’s Chinese namesake, represents today’s “Little Hong Kong” and its myriad of contradictions between traditions and modernity; superstitions and materialism; family and individuality.
Only You (2015) 命中注定
A romantic comedy starring Tang Wei and Liao Fan. A bride-to-be discovers her fiancé's high school classmate shares the name of her fated lover, as predicted by a fortune teller. Eager to ensure that she's not making a mistake, she flies to Italy to investigate and meet with him.

Lost and Love (2015) 失孤
Lost and Love 失孤 is an uplifting portrait of two lost souls who forge an unlikely friendship and, in the face of a hopelessness and despair, inspire courage and perseverance in one another. After losing his two-year-old son, Lei (Andy Lau) begins a fourteen-year-long quest in search of his missing child. On the road, he encounters with a young man, Ceng (Jing Boran), who was also kidnapped at the age of four. Robbed of the life he was meant to live, Ceng can only vaguely remember snippets of his home.

Let's Get Married (2015) 咱们结婚吧
Based on the hugely popular Chinese TV series of the same name, Let's Get Married follows the lives of four couples looking for love and to find that special someone to say “I do.”

The Golden Era (2014) 黄金时代
The life story of Xiao Hong, one of China's most famous essayists and novelists, who reflected the progressive thinking, not frequently seen during the 1930s. This is during the growing turbulence of war with Japan.

Monster Hunt (2015) 捉妖记
In an ancient world where monsters rule the land while humans keep to their own kingdom, a baby monster Wuba is born to a human father and monster queen. When mortals and creatures alike set out to capture the newborn, Wuba's adventure begins.

Mojin: The Lost Legend (2015) 鬼吹灯之寻龙诀
Three Mojin (tomb raiders), Hu Bayi, Wang Kaixuan, and Shirley Yang, retire and relocate to New York. Kaixuan believes that the Mojin deserves more than the financial despair they’ve faced in the States. The trio are pulled back into a grave-robbing game in Inner Mongolia, China.

Mountains May Depart (2015) 山河故人
An intimate drama and a decades-spanning epic that leaps from the recent past to the present to the speculative near-future, Jia Zhangke's new film is an intensely moving study of how China’s economic boom and the culture of materialism has affected the bonds of family, tradition, and love.

The Mermaid (2016) 美人鱼
Xuan’s real estate project involving reclamation of the sea threatens the livelihood of the mermaids who rely on the sea to survive. Mermaid Shan is dispatched to assassinate Xuan, but as they spend more time together, Xuan and Shan begin to fall in love.
The Confucius Institute at the University of Michigan (CIUM) strives to be a leader of U-M’s diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative. All CIUM activities have DEI messages embedded as its core mission is to promote Chinese arts and culture, bringing cultural diversity to the U-M campus and its vicinity.

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