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OPEN-AIR CINEMA

in partnership with CIFRA Platform

Preface

Outdoor cinema is a memory from my childhood, with blurry characters and scenes, sudden moments, and us, a group of boys, often confused by the plot. The films would start and end amid our roughhousing. 'Breaking' (1984), 'Rock Youth' (1988), *Fong Sai-Yuk* (1993). I remember the nights outside my home in Beijing, where everyone gathered like an army, carrying their own small stools and mats. The mosquitoes were particularly numerous, and in the distance, a bright silver screen seemed like a gateway to another world. The sound effects of the film echoed like they were coming from a canyon, and a single line from far away might not be clearly heard. Perhaps because we were boys who loved to roughhouse, we often couldn't remember the romantic scenes. The subtle expressions of love in films from the 1980s and 1990s would make those who understood them blush. Those of us who didn't understand often couldn't even remember what we had watched.

I lived in an industrial area where different factories would show films regularly or irregularly. People who knew each other and strangers would gather together happily. At that time, there were no boundaries between the countryside and the town. Next to the highway was a wheat field. Once, while reminiscing about these times, I sat on the back of my father's bicycle. The poplar trees on both sides blocked out the sky. The road was made of dirt and stones, muddy and pitted when it rained. Even when it didn't rain, if a large truck passed by, dust would rise several metres high. During the summer, everything was warm and yellow, bright and clear.

In response to the curatorial concept of Rachel Rits-Volloch and David Elliot for *Landscapes of Futures Past* at the Jiayuanhai Art Museum, I think the above text is about the past and the future, and is a landscape that will always remain in my mind and cannot disappear.

Liu Sanjie [Third Sister Liu] (1960), directed by Su Li, 1h 57m

The Guangxi landscape and local actors are particularly noteworthy, especially the folk songs, costumes, and ecology that have been passed down through the generations. Local opera is one of the intangible cultural heritages that transcends time and is slowly disappearing.

Romance on Lushan Mountain (1980), directed by Huang Zumo, 1h 30m

'Romance on Lushan Mountain' is a romantic love story set on Lushan Mountain. Last August, I visited the area with friends and saw that there was a dedicated cinema screening this film, but unfortunately, I missed it due to the late screening time. In 1980, China was in the early stages of reform and opening up, and many new things and ideas were emerging. The love portrayed in the film is vague and can leave one feeling a bit melancholic. Especially at the beginning, when the two protagonists speak in English through a tree: 'I love my motherland.' Here, 'motherland' represents motherhood and serves as a substitute for expressing love in that era. Love in that time had to be vast and passionate. The film often takes place in landscapes, dreams, and montages, and sometimes, time is out of sync. The protagonist is more like a narrator of the era, spanning the era of his parents' generation. This is also related to the context of that era, where individuals, families, and the nation were inseparable.

This often makes me think of words like 'the tide of the times,' which represents the lives of each individual. The key to this film, apart from the love story, is that it represents an era that is open to accepting its past and welcoming a new era.

Camel Xiangzi [Rickshaw Boy] (1982), directed by Ling Zifeng, 2h 3m

The Horse Thief (1986), directed by Tian Zhuangzhuang & Pan Peicheng, 1h 28m

The Camel Xiangzi is set in Beijing before liberation, and The Horse Thief is set in Tibet. If Dutch landscape paintings have a certain style, then the images of landscapes and people in Chinese films of the 1980s allowed viewers to see China's beautiful mountains and rivers, providing a momentary spiritual flow in their minds for landscapes they had never seen before. For a southern viewer, the northern landscape is empty and harsh: desert, heavy snow, and strong winds. While for a northern viewer, the south is synonymous with dampness and gloom, where everything seems to be shrouded in rain. The seasons are distinct, or there are only spring and summer. Landscape and geography are the ties that connect people and culture. Films of the 1980s strove for authenticity in their settings, which served as a manifesto for the fifth generation of directors, where the landscape was stylised with strong colours and people.

Three... Life Is a Dream [Still Life] (2006), directed by Jia Zhangke, 1h 48m

Jia Zhangke's film features rare scenes of science fiction, such as mountains suddenly flying away, which are more like human illusions. This is also the huge illusion presented by the entire film. All the characters and events seem to be seriously telling a true fantasy story, which is closely related to human existence and the changing times. The seemingly loose threads all focus on the traces of individuals in the landscape.

The Monkey King: Uproar in Heaven (1964), directed by Wan Laiming & Cheng Tang, 1h 54m
Nezha Conquers the Sea [Nezha Conquers the Dragon King] (1979), directed by Wang Shuchen, Yan Ding Xian, Ada, 58m

Magic Lantern [Lotus Lantern](1999), directed by Chang Guangxi & Wang Dawei, 85m

The above three works are all from the Shanghai Animation Film Studio.

The Monkey King: Uproar in Heaven is included here because this animated film was shown every few days during my childhood. At that time, there was always an old TV set, and a group of people would gather in the courtyard to watch it together. From black and white to colour, everyone knew the story, which ended with Sun Wukong chasing away the Jade Emperor. Unlike the Journey to the West, there are no appearances by the Buddha or Guanyin, no 500 years of being trapped under a mountain, and no subsequent quest to the West. It embodies a heroic spirit, as Mao Zedong once said: 'To overthrow an old world and establish a new one.' Today, this is the best version of Sun Wukong—born into the world without any purpose, unconstrained by anything, and never saddened by his own insignificance.

This film is particularly suitable for children because Sun Wukong is every child—often making mistakes but not caring. As they grow up, they will marvel at the beauty of 'The Monkey King,' the arduousness of hand-drawn animation, and the beauty of the music—things they couldn't appreciate as children. These elements make this work a classic and suitable for adults as well, because adults may not have the time to appreciate it again, the projection of their childhood selves, and such a beautiful work.

The three works produced by the Shanghai Animation Film Studio are all masterpieces, but due to the limitations of their time, most people saw them on television, from black-and-white to colour, until the release of 'The Legend of the Magic Lantern' when these animated films finally broke free from their connection to television. Perhaps these films deserve to be seen again in the cinema, with their scenes and characters reconstructed.

Conclusion

Some films are classics from the early days of reform and opening up. The films of the 1980s revisited the diversity of humanity and landscapes. Reform and opening up brought people together on a human level, highlighting the experiences of different individuals and societies. Even when revisiting pre-liberation literature, such as Lao She's **Camel Xiangzi**, these works use the perspective of their own era to re-examine China and the Chinese people. Era and landscape are inseparable; through the landscapes in these films, people may glimpse the beauty of the past and present, the wheat fields of the past and those of today. The landscapes themselves may not have changed much, but the ambiance has evolved because the viewers—the people—have already changed.

Responding to the curatorial concept of Rachel Rits-Volloch and David Elliott for *Landscapes of Futures Past* is a paradox of thought, a chaotic interplay of turmoil and eternal questions: Can one find oneself in the landscape? Zhuangzi (c. 369–286 BCE), Li Bai (701–762), Lu You (1125–1210), Xu Xiake (1587–1641): which aspects of the world, poetry, and travelogues imagined by the ancients resonate with today? Which have changed with the passage of time? Which may have remained unchanged? I want to return to the human dimension, to explore anthropocentrism. The landscapes of the past and future are all about people—the spaces where they live, what they see, hear, and think. An ancient poem, a modern painting, or a future film are all about how people use their imagination to create and expand their perceptions. Under the concept of the Anthropocene, in geological terms, human existence is also part of the landscape. What about emotions?

What is changing? What remains the same?

There are some films that I hope to see again on the big screen outdoors, because these films are disappearing from our lives and memories. Additionally, films should not merely be streaming content on phones, tablets, and computers, causing us to overlook the richness of audiovisual experiences. Films are also the pinnacle of technological development, a temporal and spatial magic created for collective development. As old films fade away, so too will the technology that accompanied them—projection equipment, projectionists, 35mm film, and more.