



26.10 *The Bandit Queen*: Phoolan Devi protects her wounded lover.



26.11 *Bombay*'s vision of a united India: as the parents are reunited with their children, hands drop weapons and stretch out in friendship.

critical cinema. “In India, there is no salvation outside the commercial cinema.”¹ Also pursuing this path was Mani Rathnam, a Tamil filmmaker who found great success with *Nayakan* (“Hero,” 1986), an adaptation of *The Godfather*. Rathnam’s *Bombay* (1994) denounces the bloody religious strife of the early 1990s. A Hindu journalist marries a Muslim woman, and the couple and their children are thrust into the middle of anti-Muslim rioting. *Bombay* neighborhoods are spectacularly re-created in a Madras studio, riot scenes are shot and edited for visceral force, hand-held cameras race through the streets, and children watch as people trapped in cars are burned alive. Banned in some Indian states, *Bombay* proved successful in most regions, thanks not only to its topicality but also to its star performances, engaging music, and redemptive ending, in which hands drop their weapons and stretch out in friendship (26.11).

Apart from the works of Nair and Kapur, few Indian films were seen on the festival circuit. One that was, however, offered thoughtful testimony about the years of political violence. Santosh Sivan’s Tamil-language film *The Terrorist* (1998) focuses on a woman who has joined an assassination plot (evidently modeled on the 1991 killing of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi). As the conspiracy moves forward, she discovers the importance of human life. Sivan was under no illusions that the film would attract a mass audience. “We didn’t want to make it like one masala package.”²

Hollywood had long targeted India, where theaters attracted up to 7 billion viewers per year. In 1992, the government ended the NFDC’s monopoly on film import, and, for the first time, recent American movies poured in. The success of *Jurassic Park* in 1994 and *Titanic* in 1998 convinced Hollywood that the market would respond to the right blockbusters.

Yet local audiences remained loyal to the national product—which was now incorporating more sexuality along with MTV dance styles (e.g., *Trimurti*, 1995). *Jurassic Park* was unable to trump another 1994 release, the traditional romantic comedy-drama *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* (“Who Am I to You?”). Filled with sparkling studio-shot dance numbers (Color Plate 26.5), it became the most popular film of the decade. Even after restrictions were lifted, American imports claimed no more than 10 percent of the box office. In a country where nearly half the population earned only a dollar a day, admission to a local film ran only about fifty cents while Hollywood films were priced between two and three dollars per ticket. And, despite rounds of violence as gangsters intimidated producers, there were other signs of health. Indian films were starting to sell in Europe, Japan, and North America, while an up-to-date, 2000-acre production complex was attracting foreign filmmakers.

JAPAN

While Japan was becoming one of the world’s great economic powers in the 1970s, its film companies were falling on hard times. As in western countries, the problems began with slumping attendance. In 1958, the peak year for the Japanese box office, 1.2 billion tickets were sold; in 1972, fewer than 200 million were sold. The studios cut production to around 350 features per year. The vertically integrated Toei, Toho, and Shochiku ruled the domestic market, but the latter two put little money into filmmaking, preferring to invest in other leisure-time industries.

The studios’ most dependable in-house projects came to be their endless series, such as Toho’s *Godzilla*

movies and Shochiku's sentimental Tora-San dramas. Like their Hollywood counterparts, most of the studios built their release schedules out of independent projects that they had helped finance. The Big Three dominated distribution and exhibition, so they still controlled the market. The most profitable genres were martial-arts films, *yakuza* (gangster) tales, science-fiction movies (based on the success of *Star Wars*), disaster films, and the so-called *roman porno* (soft-core pornography).

Independent Filmmaking: An Irreverent Generation

As the studios floundered, independent production and distribution gained ground (p. 530). Smaller firms financed nonstudio projects and became strong presences in international export. The most artistically oriented independent group was the Art Theater Guild (ATG), founded in 1961 and throughout the 1970s still funding a few films by Nagisa Oshima, Susumu Hani, Yoshige Yoshida, Kaneto Shindo, and other New Wave directors. The ATG also owned a circuit of art-house theaters for showcasing its product. Bigger independent companies founded by department stores, television companies, and publishing concerns also began producing films, and these firms gave the studios stiff competition.

Most of the well-established auteurs were able to work by acquiring financing from both the studios and independent sources. Kon Ichikawa had a hit with a *Godfather*-type gangster story, *The Inugami Family* (1976), financed by Toho and a publishing house specializing in crime fiction. Shohei Imamura's own company joined with Shochiku for a characteristic tale of rape and revenge, *Vengeance Is Mine* (1979). His *Ballad of Narayama* (1983), a Toei production, won worldwide notice for its presentation of the rural custom of abandoning the old to die.

The most renowned big-budget directors moved toward internationally financed productions. Akira Kurosawa's *Dersu Uzala* (1975) was a Russian project; *Kagemusha* (1980) and *Ran* (1985) were assisted by French and U.S. backing. *Dreams* (1990) was partially financed by Warner Bros.

Nagisa Oshima's international coproductions *Empire of Passion* (1978), *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (1982), and *Max mon amour* (1986), the last made without any Japanese participation, represented a retreat from the disjunctive experimentation of his works of the 1960s. None of these productions matched the scandalous success of his first French-Japanese vehicle, *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976). Based on a famous 1936 incident, it centers on a man and woman who withdraw from the political upheavals of their day into a world of

erotic play. At the climax, the man languidly succumbs to murder and mutilation. The film relinquishes virtually all the modernist experimentation that had made Oshima famous, presenting its erotic encounters in sumptuous imagery (Color Plate 26.6). Although shot in Japan, *In the Realm of the Senses* was heavily censored there.

Imamura, Kurosawa, and Oshima slowed their pace to a film every four or five years. While they struggled to find backing for their ambitious projects, a younger generation was glad to work quickly and cheaply. The super-8mm underground, often Punk-flavored, carried several directors to mainstream production. Born around 1960, the new generation found political modernism as alien as the New Wave directors had found the great tradition of Ozu and Mizoguchi. The young directors of the late 1970s and early 1980s reveled in the anarchic vulgarity of violent *manga* (comic books) and heavy-metal rock music. Financed by the Art Theater Guild and some major studios, they attacked the stereotypes of Japanese harmony and prosperity with a raucous humor.

Not surprisingly, they often concentrated on youth culture, with such rocker-biker films as *Crazy Thunder Road* (1980, Sogo Ishii). Domestic tradition was another target. In Yoshimitsu Morita's *The Family Game* (1983), a college student tutoring a boy winds up seducing an entire family. Sogo Ishii offered *The Crazy Family* (1984), in which household hatreds escalate into a desperate chainsaw battle. The same absurd violence permeates Shinya Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo* (1989). Tsukamoto, who started shooting super-8mm movies at age 14, worked in an advertising agency and directed television commercials before he produced this raw fantasy about ordinary citizens becoming robots as a result of their macabre erotic impulses.

Parallel to the new generation of live-action directors there emerged a group of animators specializing in feature-length science-fiction and fantasy cartoons known as *anime*. Derived from manga, these energetic films features robots, astronauts, and superheroic teenagers (even schoolgirls, as in *Project A-Ko*, 1986). Several domestic box-office hits of the 1980s were animated features, and one, Katsuhiro Otomo's bloody, postapocalyptic *Akira* (1987), became a cult success in other countries. Working with low budgets, anime artists gave up much of the complex movement of classic animation in favor of canted angles, rapid editing, computer-generated imagery, and a striking command of gradual shading and translucent surfaces (Color Plate 26.7). Anime of all types yielded profitable foreign television and videocassette sales.

Another hope of the mainstream industry was Juzo Itami. Son of a distinguished director, he had been an



26.12 *The Funeral*: a family member takes a snapshot. “Get a little closer to the coffin. Look sad.”

actor, a screenwriter, and an author since the 1960s. Itami’s *The Funeral* (1985; 26.12), *Tampopo* (1986), and *A Taxing Woman* (1987) are mordant satires of contemporary Japanese life. Full of physical comedy and mockery of the new consumerist Japan, they became highly exportable items and made Itami the most visible Japanese director of the 1980s.

The success of the “New Japanese Cinema” was undergirded by industrial factors. As in the United States, the decline in attendance leveled off; by the late 1970s, it stabilized at around 150 million annually. The market could support about 250 films per year, although at least half of these would be low-budget, soft-core pornography. Producers sought filmmakers willing to turn out inexpensive films attuned to the free-spending younger audience.

Yet even offbeat films faced increasingly stiff competition from U.S. firms. In 1976, for the first time, receipts from foreign films surpassed those from Japanese films. By the end of the 1980s, most of each year’s top-grossing films were American, and Japanese films made up only about one-third of all features released. Japan replaced Britain as Hollywood’s biggest foreign market.

The film industry, facing few export prospects and sharper competition at home, drew some hope from its new directors and from favorable tax laws that encouraged motion-picture investments. In addition, the studios’ control of exhibition guaranteed them a share of Hollywood’s income. Yet even this security was shaken in 1993, when Time Warner, in partnership with a Japanese supermarket chain, opened a chain of multiplex theaters. Slowly the Big Three launched multiplexes of their own.

In the meantime, Japanese business was coming to terms with Hollywood in another arena. By 1980, the

country was supreme in manufacturing automobiles, watches, motorcycles, cameras, and electronic goods. Japan replaced the United States as the world’s major creditor, holding the largest banks and insurance companies and investing billions of dollars in foreign companies and real estate. During the same period, investment companies began funneling hundreds of millions of dollars to Hollywood firms. With the launching of pay television and high-definition television, Japanese media companies needed attractive material of the sort that Hollywood could provide.

Most spectacularly, Japanese manufacturers of consumer electronics were buying Hollywood studios. Sony purchased Columbia Pictures Entertainment for \$3.4 billion in 1989, while Matsushita Electric Industrial Company paid \$6 billion for Music Corporation of America, the parent company of Universal Pictures. The latter was the largest investment any Japanese company had ever made in a U.S. firm. Matsushita eventually pulled out, selling MCA/Universal to Seagram. After purchasing Columbia, Sony had a rocky time of it at first, eventually writing off over \$1 billion in debt. Still, Japanese firms had shown their desire to operate as global media players.

The 1990s: The Punctured Bubble and a New Surge of Talent

Japan’s boom decades were followed by a steep and prolonged recession, with falling stock prices and real estate values bringing the economy to a halt. The long-ruling Liberal Democratic party, repeatedly exposed as corrupt, could respond only by sinking more money into the construction industry. In this climate, the vertically integrated movie companies became even more stagnant. They preserved their power at the box office through superior distribution power and the tradition of forcing employees of the studios or of allied businesses to buy movie tickets. For the world outside Japan, the interesting films were largely independent products, and fresh talent began to attract festival prizes and foreign distribution.

Young directors, many of whom started with 8mm student films, began to win acclaim. Shinji Aoyama’s melancholy and disturbing *Eureka* (2000) galvanized festivals. The film begins with a brother and sister taken hostage on a bus, but the film is not a conventional action picture (26.13); instead it focuses on the efforts of the bus driver to heal the teenagers’ wounded lives after the crisis. Shunji Iwai directed the offbeat romance *Love Letter* (1995) and the dystopian fantasy *Swallowtail Butterfly* (1996). The tirelessly self-promoting Sabu (Hiroyuki Tanaka) made post-Tarantino genre exercises



26.13 *Eureka*: the bus driver and a policeman at the mercy of the hijacker.

like *Dangan Runner* (1996), about three men chasing through Tokyo, and *Sunday* (2000), about a young salaryman dragged into a gang war. Several filmmakers examined gay sexuality; Ryosuke Hashiguchi's *Like Grains of Sand* (1995) presented a sensitive study of schoolboys exploring their affection for each other.

More in the mainstream was Masayuki Suo, who sought to revive early-Ozu comedy in a series of films about young people, notably *Shiko Funjatta* (aka *Sumo Do, Sumo Don't*, 1992), centering on the adventures of a college Sumo team (26.14). Suo found international success with his wistful salaryman comedy *Shall We Dance?* (1995). Likewise, Hirokoza Koreeda won attention with *Maborosi* (1995), a subdued drama of a widow learning to love her second husband. The stately, often distant, compositions celebrate the beauty of everyday life (Color Plate 26.8) and the forbidding but fascinating seaside landscape of the community in which the wife finds herself. Koreeda's *After Life* (1998) presents a benevolent limbo in which the dead are allowed to record their most precious memory on film.

Many of the most intriguing directors worked in downscale genres. Kyoshi Kurosawa (no relation to Akira Kurosawa) loosed a barrage of enigmatic and shocking works, using crime plots or horror conventions in quirky ways. *Cure* (1997) is about a detective tracking a killer who is able to control his victim's minds. *Kairo* (aka *Pulse*, 2001) suggests that ghosts haunt the Internet. Takeshi Miike, Kurosawa's contemporary, also reworked pulp material, turning out movies at a pace no less frantic than that of the plots. *Fudoh: The New Generation* (1996) centers on schoolboy gangsters and schoolgirl assassins. *Dead or Alive* (1999) is a hard-driving crime movie, while *Audition* (1999) begins as a slightly perverse romance (a salaryman auditions women as girlfriends) and ends in carnage (when he gets more than he bargained for; 26.15).

The most significant director of the 1990s was Takeshi Kitano (aka "Beat" Takeshi). Japanese audiences



26.14 A team of sumo misfits and their cheerful cheerleader (*Sumo Do, Sumo Don't*).



26.15 In *Audition*, the salaryman's chosen woman answers his call; unbeknownst to him, a mysterious sack (containing a previous lover?) thrashes helplessly behind her.



26.16 A typical Kitano "clothesline" composition (*Sonatine*).

loved him as a TV comedian but turned away from his movies. It was on the international scene that he won praise for brutal yakuza movies such as *Boiling Point* (1990), *Sonatine* (1993), and *Hana-bi* (1997). Kitano cultivated a deadpan style of performance and image design, with characters often facing the camera, lined up like figures in a simple comic strip (26.16). They speak seldom, stare at each other, and remain strangely frozen when violence flares up. Kitano's films compel attention

by unashamedly alternating brusque rhythm with almost childish poignancy, especially when he returns to his favorite motifs—sports, adolescent pranks, flowers, the sea. His sense of color has a naive immediacy (**Color Plate 26.9**), and he warms his spare visuals with the cartoonish tinkle of Joe Hisaishi's musical scores. Kitano's work outside the yakuza genre includes *A Scene at the Sea* (1991), a wistful tale of a deaf-mute couple, and his coming-of-age movie *Kids Return* (1996).

In the late 1990s, Japanese horror won new audiences with a cycle of mystical Japanese films about a videocassette that kills anyone who watches it (*Ring*, 1998, and its sequels). The Asian craze for *Ring* resembled the western response to *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). Still, anime remained Japan's most popular film export, with 250 hours of it produced each year. The new god of anime was Hayao Miyazaki. His charming features *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) and *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989) made their way to Europe and North America slowly, but they became perennials of video rental. *Princess Mononoke* (1997) blends Miyazaki's splendid linear style with selective use of computer techniques to enhance cel animation (**Color Plate 26.10**).

Miyazaki's works broke local box-office records; *Spirited Away* (2001) became the top-grossing Japanese film to date and the first non-U.S. film to earn more than \$200 million outside the United States. But such rare hits could not revive the Japanese industry. At the end of the 1990s, 250 or more features were being made each year, most going unseen. Average yearly attendance hovered at one visit per person, and the Big Three studios clung to power. Nonetheless, the scale of Japanese investments overseas ensured the nation a central place in international film commerce, and a surge of excellent films brought new attention to one of the world's most venerable national cinemas.

MAINLAND CHINA: THE FIFTH GENERATION AND BEYOND

"To make money is glorious!" With this slogan, Deng Xiaoping announced the Chinese government's intention to redeem China's economy and encourage mildly capitalistic reforms. Marketing of privately grown agricultural produce, joint ventures with foreign companies, and other types of free enterprise were introduced. Yet China's leadership tried to promote these economic reforms without liberalizing individual rights.

During China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), few films were made (p. 551) and the Beijing Film Acad-

emy was closed. Under the new and more open policies, the cinema began slowly to recover.

To supply the theaters while production was geared up, hundreds of banned pre-1966 films were rereleased. Foreign films were again imported, and Chinese filmmakers could see works from the European art cinema of the 1960s and 1970s.

Production climbed steadily, from 19 features (1977) to 125 (1986). Most films made soon after the Cultural Revolution tended to revert to the polished studio style. *Rickshaw Boy* (1982, Ling Zifeng), a melodrama set in the prerevolutionary period, concerns a man who loses his rickshaw and must rent one from his boss, whose daughter pressures him into marrying her. Meanwhile, a young woman living in the same courtyard has to become a prostitute in order to support her brothers. All the characters in the film meet unhappy endings. This glossy studio picture recalled *The New Year's Sacrifice* and other 1950s works (p. 405).

A few films, however, began to imitate European models. Yang Yanjin and Deng Yimin's *Bitter Laughter* (1979), set during the Cultural Revolution, centers on a journalist forced to write inaccurate stories. *Bitter Laughter's* style reflects art-cinema influences, using flashbacks, vision scenes, and many special effects to convey subjectivity. Yang, who had graduated just before the Beijing Film Academy closed in 1968, went on to make *The Alley* (1981), a film that offers three alternative endings. Wu Yigong's *My Memories of Old Beijing* (1980) consists of three stories in flashback, filtered through a little girl. While Cultural Revolution policies had favored films with simple character types and unambiguous meanings, these films utilized psychological depth, symbolism, and ambiguity.

The Fifth Generation

Chinese film historians have typically slotted filmmakers into generations associated with major political events. The Fourth Generation of filmmakers began their careers following the Revolution of 1949. Their most prominent member was Xie Jin, who directed *Two Stage Sisters* (p. 406).

The Beijing Film Academy reopened in 1978, admitting a new class into the four-year program. In 1982, the graduates, along with a few directors who worked their way up the studio ranks, formed what was known as the Fifth Generation. Several of these became the first Chinese filmmakers whose work was widely known abroad. These students had had unusual training. During the Cultural Revolution, education had emphasized

Chronology of China's Fifth Generation

1978	● Beijing Film Academy reopens after Cultural Revolution.
1982	● First class of students graduates.
1983	● <i>One and Eight</i> , Zhang Junzha; cinematography, Zhang Yimou <i>The Candidate</i> , Wu Ziniu
1984	● <i>Yellow Earth</i> , Chen Kaige; cin., Zhang Yimou <i>Secret Decree</i> , Wu Ziniu <i>Life</i> , Wu Tianming (Xi'an Film Studio) <i>The Big Parade</i> , Chen Kaige; cin., Zhang Yimou
1985	● <i>In the Wild Mountains</i> , Yan Xueshu (Xi'an Film Studio) <i>Army Nurse</i> , Hu Mei <i>Swan Song</i> , Zhang Zeming <i>The Black Cannon Incident</i> , Huang Jianxin (Xi'an Film Studio) <i>On the Hunting Ground</i> , Tian Zhuangzhuang <i>The Dove Tree</i> , Wu Ziniu (banned),
1986	● <i>Old Well</i> , Wu Tianming; cin., Zhang Yimou (Xi'an Film Studio) <i>The Stand-In (aka Dislocation)</i> , Huang Jianxin (Xi'an Film Studio) <i>The Horse Thief</i> , Tian Zhuangzhuang (Xi'an Film Studio) <i>The Last Day of Winter</i> , Wu Ziniu
1987	● <i>Far from War</i> , Hu Mei <i>The Drum Singers (aka The Street Players)</i> , Tian Zhuangzhuang <i>Red Sorghum</i> , Zhang Yimou (Xi'an Film Studio) <i>King of the Children</i> , Chen Kaige (Xi'an Film Studio) <i>The Sun and the Rain</i> , Zhang Zeming
1988	● <i>Evening Bell</i> , Wu Ziniu
1989	● April: Pro-democracy demonstrations begin in and around Tiananmen Square. June 3–4: The demonstrations are forcibly put down by the government.

rote learning, mostly based on Mao's writings. Fifth Generation filmmakers, however, were not taught exactly what to think. Chen Kaige, one of the most famous members of the group, recalled his education:

I really appreciated my teachers because they didn't know how to teach us. They hadn't taught anybody for ten years. They were very openminded. They said they would not teach the old way they used to, the old-fashioned way. We would see films, work nights, and have discussions.³

These students saw many imported films and proved susceptible to their influence. By 1983, the works of these Fifth Generation filmmakers were being released (see box).

Traditionally, each academy graduate was permanently assigned to a studio in Beijing, Shanghai, or the provinces. Several Fifth Generation filmmakers broke this pattern, moving about to find interesting work. Chen Kaige, for example, was assigned to the Beijing Film Studio, but he went instead to join a fellow graduate, cinematographer Zhang Yimou, at the Guangxi studio, where they made *Yellow Earth* and *The Big Parade*. Tian Zhuangzhuang, also delegated to the Beijing Film Studio, could get no directional work, and so he went to the tiny Inner Mongolia Film Studio to make *On the Hunting Ground*.

Virtually all the Fifth Generation films were made at such provincial studios. The most significant was the Xi'an Film Studio, a medium-size facility in central China. It had had a poor record before Wu Tianming

took over as its head in 1983. Wu, an actor who had begun directing in 1979, became a patron to the Fifth Generation, hiring young filmmakers and giving them artistic freedom. As the chronology in the box indicates, over a third of the Fifth Generation films were made at Xi'an. Wu also asked cinematographer Zhang Yimou to come from Guangxi to photograph *Old Well*. Zhang agreed on condition that he then be allowed to direct. His film, *Red Sorghum*, became the most popular early Fifth Generation work, both in China and abroad.

The Fifth Generation filmmakers, influenced by European art films, reacted against the Cultural Revolution. Whereas Cultural Revolution films used character types, the younger directors favored psychological depth. Instead of presenting simple tales with clear-cut meanings, they adopted complex narratives, ambiguous symbolism, and vivid, evocative imagery. Their films remained political, but they strove to explore issues rather than restate approved policy.

Huang Jianxin's *The Black Cannon Incident* is a bitter satire on bureaucracy. A German adviser supervising the assembly of heavy equipment in China needs a translator with technical expertise. The best translator happens to send a telegram concerning a "black cannon," a game piece. Mistaking the phrase for a code, party officials remove him from the job and launch an elaborate inquiry that eventually damages expensive equipment. Huang uses a series of flashbacks to follow the investigation. His color design aids the satire, as in a stylized set where the officials meet (**Color Plate 26.11**).

King of the Children, by Chen Kaige, also exemplifies how some of the Fifth Generation filmmakers emphasized narrative subtlety and striking visual design. A young man, sent to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, is suddenly assigned to teach at a rural school. Trying to inspire the students to think for themselves rather than learn by rote, he runs afoul of his superiors and is dismissed. At the end, his departure from the village is interrupted by imagery of a fire sweeping over the countryside—perhaps symbolizing the devastation of the Cultural Revolution or the purifying effects of ending it. Such an ambiguous scene suggests the influence of European art cinema. Motifs of setting and color in *King of the Children* contrast the enclosed world of the school and the vast terrain surrounding it.

Some Fifth Generation films make even fewer concessions to popular entertainment. Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Horse Thief*, for example, simply follows a horse thief and his family as they roam Tibet for a year. Tian does not explain Tibetan rituals and customs. The film's

interest lies in its very exoticism and in its handsome shots of barren plains, mountains, and temples.

Most Fifth Generation films were criticized for being too obscure for peasants, who made up 80 percent of the Chinese population. China had no tradition of art theaters where specialized audiences could see such films. Whereas a popular film might circulate in a hundred or more copies, only six prints of *The Horse Thief* were made. Few Fifth Generation films did well financially, so Wu Tianming produced more popularly oriented films at Xi'an to balance the losses. In addition, because these films drew on foreign influences, they could be appreciated abroad more easily than most other Chinese films. The money earned by exporting Fifth Generation films helped the group to keep working.

Even as it was gaining fame abroad, however, the group began encountering more difficulties at home. During late 1986, a series of student protests for greater political reforms led the government to tighten control. It conducted a campaign against "bourgeois liberalization," including foreign influences. In cinema, officials demanded accessible, profitable films. As a result, during 1987 and 1988, some Fifth Generation filmmakers undertook more commercial projects. Tian Zhuangzhuang switched from the austere style of *The Horse Thief* and made a slick film called *Rock Kids*. Huang Jianxin and others worked in television. In 1987, Chen Kaige left for New York.

The government's violent suppression of the pro-democracy movement of 1989 brought an end to the Fifth Generation as a cohesive unit. Wu Tianming emigrated to California, while Huang Jianxin went to teach in Australia. Most of those who remained in China worked in popularly oriented film and television.

The Sixth Generation and Illegal Films

Directors who managed to keep working in their own styles often depended on foreign financing. Chen Kaige's *Life on a String* (1991) was produced with German, British, and Chinese backing. A legendlike story of a wandering blind musician and his apprentice, the film contains even more symbolism and ambiguities than Chen's earlier films. Filmed in China, it continues his reliance on expressionistic, overpowering landscape (**Color Plate 26.12**). Chen followed with the international art-house hit *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), *Temptress Moon* (1996), and *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1999), all international coproductions using Chinese facilities and labor but not made available to Chinese audiences.

Zhang Yimou stayed in China and made *Ju Dou* (1990) with Japanese funding. Its yellow-suffused cinematography evokes the dye shop in which the action is set (Color Plate 26.13). Zhang's sumptuous explorations of eroticism and the repression of women, such as *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) and *Story of Qiu Ju* (1992), carried his films into art theaters abroad, but they were usually banned in China. Only after they won acclaim in the West would the government permit them to be released at home. The prolific Zhang continued balancing the tastes of the festival circuit with pressures from the government while making such films as *To Live* (1994) and *Not One Less* (1999).

Other Fifth Generation veterans eventually resumed ambitious projects. Huang Jianxin returned from exile to make a series of pointed social comedies. *Back to Back, Face to Face* (1994) uncovers the jockeying for power at a cultural affairs office. *Signal Left, Turn Right* (1996) centers on a group of people taking a drivers' training course, sympathetically surveying a range of social types from the drug-addicted young man to the ambitious executive and the mother who seeks to better life for her family.

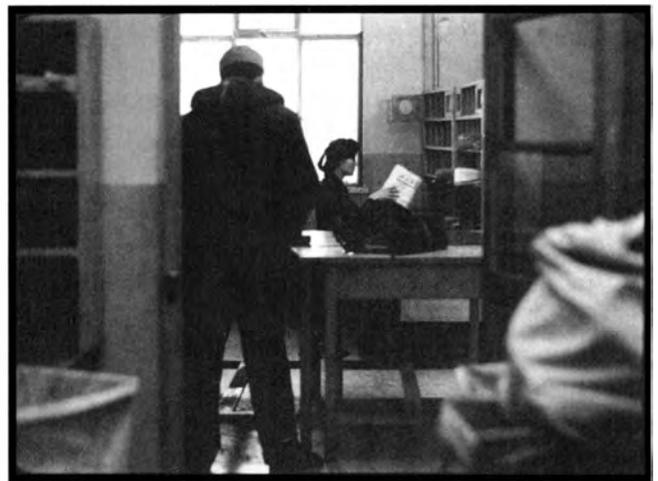
Foreign funding often provided leverage. Wu Tianming, godfather to the Fifth Generation, came back to direct the poignant *The King of Masks* (1996), about an elderly street performer. The script was Taiwanese, bought by Shaw Brothers of Hong Kong. Tian Zhuangzhuang found European and Hong Kong financing for *The Blue Kite* (1994), a chronicle of a mother's search for her husband through the years 1953 to 1967, from the Great Leap Forward to the Cultural Revolution. In bold pictorial juxtapositions, Tian questions Maoist ideology and the sacrifices it demanded of the Chinese people (26.17).

While Tian, Chen, Zhang and other Fifth Generation directors remained internationally visible, a Sixth Generation came to the fore in the early 1990s. Most were not Beijing Film Academy graduates. Rather, they were independent directors who pursued their own visions of cinema. Their movement surfaced just as China began to back off from subsidizing its film studios. Studios that produced profitable films would be rewarded with the rights to attractive foreign imports. This was a compelling offer, since foreign imports, chiefly from Hong Kong and the United States, counted for as much as 40 percent of the urban box office.

The dilemma was that, although filmmakers no longer had to be attached to a studio, only studios could release films. Independent films, made without a distribution or exhibition permit, became *dixia dianying* ("il-



26.17 Mao oversees the life of the couple in *The Blue Kite*.



26.18 *Postman*: static, rectilinear framings create a bureaucratic world.

legal films"). One of the pioneers of illegal cinema was Zhang Yuan, who began his first film, *Mama* (1990), under studio auspices. After the Tiananmen Square assault, he raised completion money from businesses, edited the movie in a hotel room, and persuaded the Xi'an Studio to release it. His second feature, *Beijing Bastards* (1993), traveled to festivals without any studio imprimatur. *The Days* (1993), made underground for \$14,000, was distributed abroad but not in China.

Centered on young people and social problems, Sixth Generation films did not fit into the government-sanctioned forms. Marital difficulties were at the center of *The Days*, while the Chinese rock culture was on display in *Beijing Bastards*. In *Postman* (1995), He Jianjun created a sparse, unsettling drama based on the premise—shocking to official ideology—that a postman might interfere with people's lives by reading and withholding their letters (26.18). Zhang Yuan's controversial *East Palace West Palace* (1996) portrays Beijing's gay cruising scene.

As illegal films triumphed at festivals, the government took sterner measures, raising obstacles to coproductions and foreign investment. After Zhang Yimou's *To Live* (1994) competed at Cannes without permission, authorities demanded that any film made in China, official or not, had to pass censorship to be shown abroad. Zhang had to offer a "self-criticism" in order to finish the French-financed *Shanghai Triad* (1994). After *The Blue Kite*, Tian Zhuangzhuang was blacklisted from any studio-based production. Directors were denied permission to leave the country, and the negatives of films shot in China were required to be deposited there until censors found them satisfactory. After *Postman*'s negative was smuggled out for completion in the Netherlands, the government also began to withhold approved films from any festivals that showed unapproved films.

This government suppression continued into the new century. Jiang Wen, one of China's most popular comedians, ran afoul of officialdom with his World War II film *Devils on the Doorstep* (2000). The film begins as a humorous portrayal of wartime culture clash, as a mysterious stranger forces a villager to keep two Japanese soldiers prisoner. He watches over them for several months and although he contemplates killing them, he finally returns them to the Japanese army. The tone switches instantly from comedy to horror as an evening feast turns into a massacre. *Devils on the Doorstep* won the Jury Prize at Cannes, but that seemed only to deepen Jiang's difficulties. As punishment for not submitting his work to censors, the film was forbidden to be shown at home or abroad, and Jiang was banned from filming or acting in China for seven years.

China's long-standing studio system of production was finished, supplying only facilities and a trademark to independent films and foreign coproductions. The most successful films were usually foreign imports, and thanks to pirated video the public could avoid the official didactic films. In this climate, directors were encouraged to create audience-pleasing commercial products, such as He Ping's *Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker* (1994). Feng Xiaogang became China's most popular filmmaker by concentrating on amusing fare showcasing the comedian Ge You. His *Be There or Be Square* (1998) centered on two mainland conmen who move to a crime-ridden Los Angeles in search of the good life. Funded by private investors, the film became the second-highest grossing film in Chinese history (following *Titanic*). Feng baited critics by declaring that he loved making money and scorned art-house movies.

Yet art-house-oriented filmmakers found ways to dodge sanctions. Lou Ye's dreamlike *Vertigo* homage, *Suzhou River* (2000; 26.19), plunges young drifters into



26.19 The mysterious kidnapped girl seems reincarnated (*Suzhou River*).

kidnapping, but the lyrical handling (reminiscent of Hong Kong's Wong Kar-wai, p. 658) softens its harsh portrayal of Shanghai street life. Like *The Blue Kite*, *Platform* (2000) undertook an ambitious survey of recent Chinese history. Director-writer Jia Zhang-ke follows a provincial acting troupe through the post-Mao period, tracing how traditions erode and young people start to question their elders' authority. *Platform*'s long-take style suggested that Chinese cinema was being influenced by Taiwanese masters like Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien (p. 660).

For two decades, the Chinese government tantalized the U.S. Majors, suggesting that the door was about to open wider. At the end of 2001, in accord with China's entry into the World Trade Organization, the government promised to privatize distribution by assigning rights among several provincial firms. But officially sanctioned output was down to about 30 features per year, and foreign pictures now claimed up to 80 percent of the box office. If Hollywood were to bring in more than the ten or so pictures per year already permitted, the local product would vanish. As a result, there were signs that the principal agency, China Film Import/Export, would reorganize in such a way as to keep tight control over what was shown. China was far from an open market, either for western companies or its own filmmakers.

NEW CINEMAS IN EAST ASIA

By 1975, of the 4,000 or so feature films made worldwide, half came from Asia. Although the bulk of these were produced in India and Japan, other countries contributed a surprising number. Malaysia, for instance, developed a significant film industry thanks to government encouragement. Similarly, Indonesian cinema benefited from protectionist legislation, allowing companies to produce an average of 70 films a year, many in a distinctive horror genre featuring "snake women." Thailand be-