German Expressionism's influence on China's 5th Generation Filmmakers and their continued relevance in Cinema today

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Abstract

- Brief history of German Expressionism and Early Chinese Cinema
- German Expressionism's influence on 5th Generation Chinese Filmmakers
- Comparison of 1 film from each film movement
- Continued relevancy in contemporary filmmaking

What makes a movie?

- Moving images paired with sound or not
- Audio and Visual storytelling
- Storytelling that reveals more about ourselves and the societies we live in.
- German Expressionism and China's 5th Generation Filmmakers have sought to reflect their respective societies via film and metaphorical storytelling as their medium.
- However, is film/TV a serious reflection of life or mere entertainment?

Introduction to German Expressionism

Expressionism: to “squeeze out” the essence of something or someone and crafting it into a visually recognizable form

German Expressionism Continued

- Takes its name from the expressionist movement in modern art during the early 20th Century
- Features themes of revolt, self-analysis, madness and primitive, sexual savagery (Courthion, 1968, pages 7-9, cited in Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts, Hayward S, 2000)
- Thrived on a ban on foreign films and support from German government post World War I.
- Mise-en-Scence (French:" to put in scene") is everything
- Camerawork is usually functional over spectacular

Mise-en-Scence

"the film image must become graphic art" –Hermann Warm (set designer on The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari and many other films)

Setting

Lighting

Costumes

Actors

Fritz Lang and Metropolis

Film

- Every scene premeditated
- Strong socio-political undertones
- Social oppression and the desire for equality in life

Imagery

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

Film as propaganda

- Heavily influenced by Nazi propaganda cinema (successor to German Expressionism)

Turmoil and oppression

- PLA's purge of intellectuals, artists, bureaucrats and suspected proponents of "Western" thinking
- Destroyed many previous developments in various fields.

Post Cultural Revolution and the 5th Generation filmmakers

Economic Reforms

- China under Deng Xiaoping became highly industrious
- Chinese cinema rejuvenates

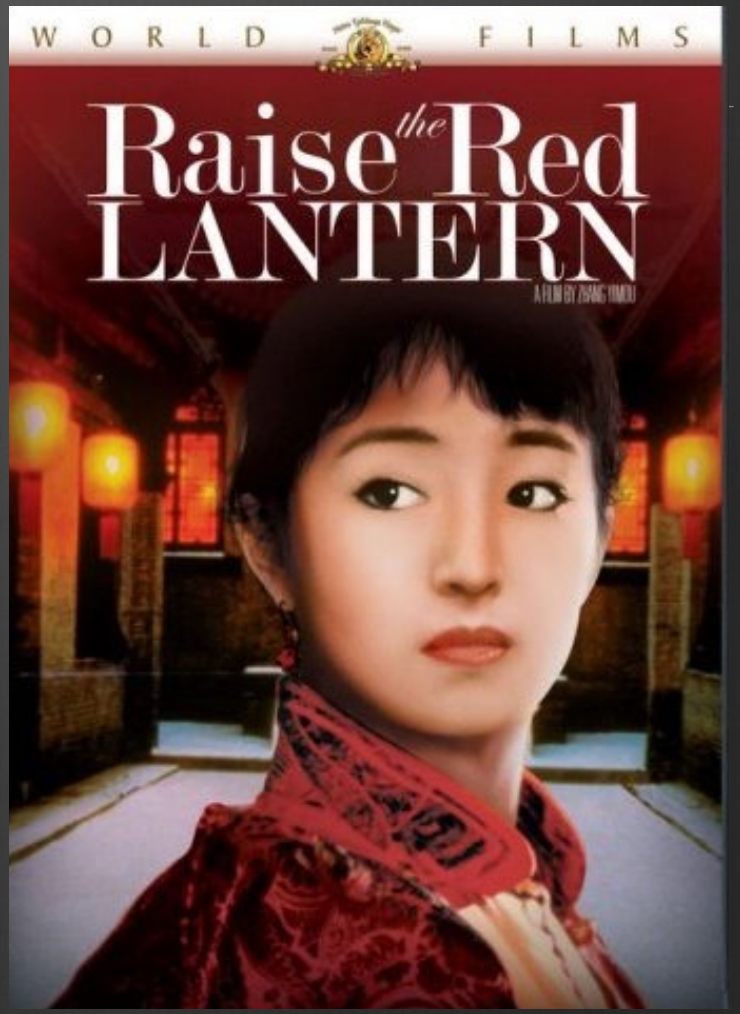
Film Education

- Beijing Film Academy reopens
- **Exposed students to foreign films**
- **Encouraged analysis and discussion**

Zhang Yimou's : "Raise the Red Lantern"

Themes

- Gender oppression
- Class differences
- Societal acceptance and adherence to 'outdated' practices and traditions



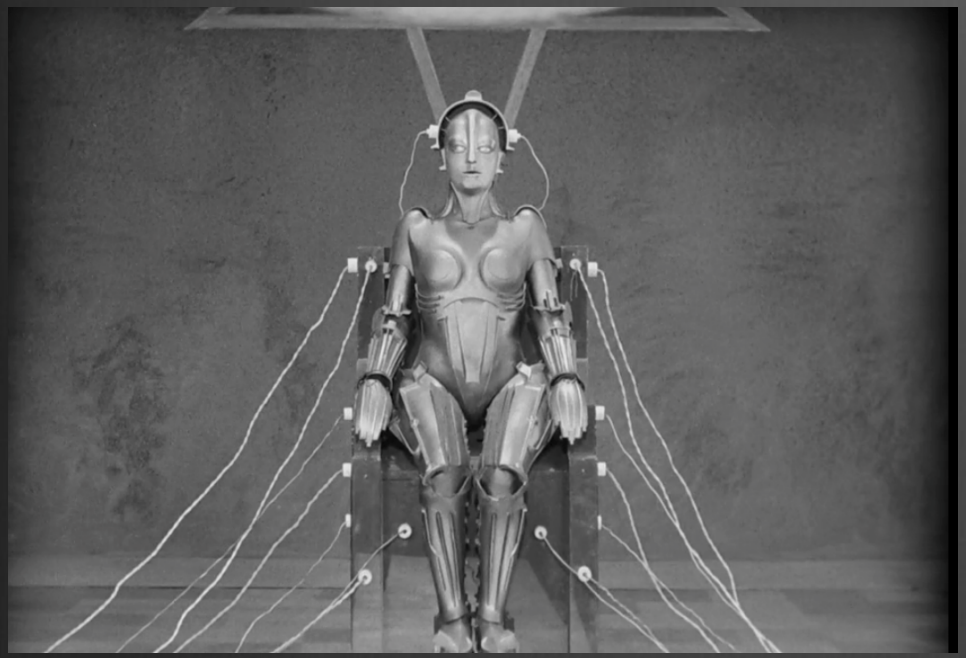
Comparison

Raise the Red Lantern

- Application of Mise-en-Scence
- Strong socio-cultural and political undertones
- Focus on storytelling to reflect societal issues
- Lacked governmental support (banned in China)

Metropolis

- Application of Mise-en-Scène
- Strong socio-political undertones
- Focus on storytelling to reflect societal issues
- Enjoyed political support from the then increasingly popular Nazi party



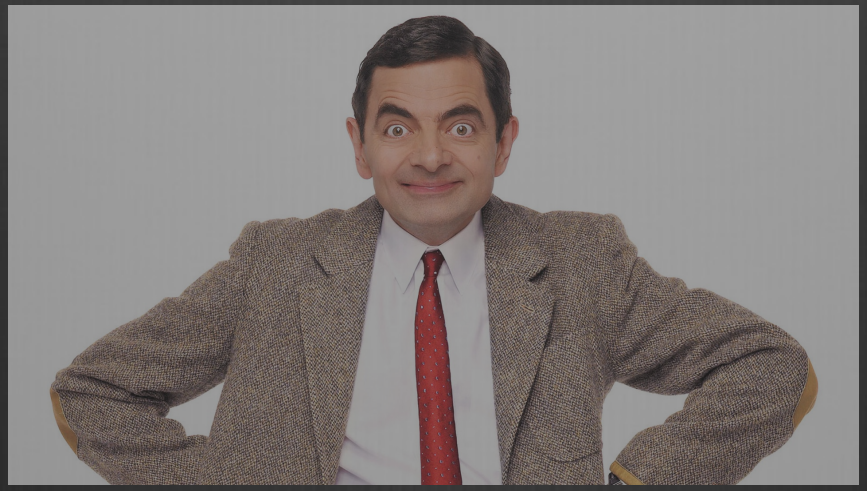
Further Comparison

- Scene from Raise the Red Lantern

- Olympia, 1863, Oil on canvas, 130.5 x 190cm by Edouard Manet

Is film/TV a serious reflection of life or mere entertainment?

- Must connect with the audience in some way
- Reflect, analyze/comment on reality in some way
- Distinct visual imagery that accentuates storytelling
- Even comedy is based on some absurdity in life



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