

***An Introduction to a Taiyupian Filmmaker, Lin Tuanqiu***  
**By Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley**

Lin Tuanqiu (also known as Lin Tuan-Chiu, 1920–1998) was born in Taoyuan into a wealthy coal-mining family in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period. His parents were theatre fans and always took Lin to theatres when he was young. Consequently, Lin's art and cinematic works were deeply rooted in his theatre aesthetics and sensibility.

Lin Tuanqiu left Taiwan for Japan to study in a senior high school and then passed the university entrance examination. He graduated from Meiji University in Tokyo in 1942. During his time as a university student, Lin frequented new theatres in Shinjuku, which attracted many Japanese intellectuals and university students at the time, including future Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata and one of the most influential Japanese filmmakers to be, Akira Kurosawa. Moreover, as Lin attended theatres very regularly and often submitted his own scripts to theatre groups, he was noticed by the people working in the Japanese creative/cultural sector. When Toho Studios were looking for trainees, Lin was recommended to work there and thus became one of the first Taiwanese filmmakers with hands-on studio experience.

Lin Tuanqiu returned to Taiwan in 1943 and served as an active member in the Taiwan New Drama Movement. He worked closely with novelist Zhang Wenhuan and theatre practitioner Wang Jingquan, both of whom were critical of colonialism and passionately argued for Taiwanese identity. In September 1943, they produced four plays in the Japanese language, but the adaptation of Taiwanese music, folk religion, traditional rituals and daily customs in the performances evoked strong Taiwanese consciousness and collective memories among the local audiences. The plays elevated Lin to be hailed as the most outstanding Taiwanese theatre worker of the time, but the Japanese government's heightened cultural control prevented Lin's theatre group from putting on further productions.

At the end of the Second World War, the Japanese left and Taiwan became part of the Republic of China (ROC) under the Nationalist (i.e. Kuomintang or KMT) government in 1945. Lin Tuanqiu and Wang Jingquan reemerged and formed in 1946 a new theatre group to realize their ideals of social reform through artistic creation. However, Lin soon discovered that the new regime's cultural policies were also politically suppressive. Some colleagues in other theatre groups became fugitives when their plays were closed down by the authorities. Lin rushed to change the name of his own theatre group and his plays to avoid becoming a target. Eventually, Lin abandoned his theatre career after the February 28<sup>th</sup> Incident of 1947, when a street dispute turned into a near revolution. In the aftermath, the ruling KMT tried to silence dissidents and local voices. Lin Tuanqiu left the arts and worked in the family business until the rise of the Taiwanese-language cinema in the mid-1950s.

During the Japanese colonial period between 1895 and 1945, Taiwan was a film market and sometimes a shooting location for Japanese films, but not a site of sustained production in its own right. Feature films were imported from Shanghai

and Hollywood, as well as Japan, until war broke out. Only after the KMT lost the civil war to Mao Zedong's Communists and retreated from the mainland to Taipei in 1949 were filmmaking facilities established on the island. However, early Mandarin-language features did not thrive at the box office until the mid-1960s.

Meanwhile, a minor industry had developed in Hong Kong producing so-called "Amoy dialect" films, many featuring opera performers. Amoy is another name for Xiamen, a city in Fujian Province just across the Taiwan Straits, and the Amoy dialect is a form of Minnanhua very like Taiwanese. When these films were imported into Taiwan, they were very successful, because local audiences could watch films without translation for the first time. Inspired and threatened by this success, local opera entrepreneurs got the idea to fight back with Taiwanese-language films. The first privately produced Taiwanese-language film is usually recognized by scholars as *Six Talents' Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Liu caizi xixiangji*, dir. Shao Luohui, 1955). But the first major box office hit was *Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan* (*Xue pinggui yu wang baochuan*, dir. He Jiming, 1956), which was based on a local *gezaixi//koa-a-hi* opera. As a result, many date the beginning of the Taiwanese-language cinema to 1956, when the success of *Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan* triggered a spate of Taiwanese-language films.

With financial support from fellow culturati, Lin Tuanqiu established Yufeng Motion Pictures in June 1957 and Hushan Film Studio in 1958. Modelled on Japan's Takarazuka Film Studios, Lin's ambition was to make Yufeng and Hushan Taiwan's industry leader, including the scale of the studios, the quality of all the facilities, and the employment of foreign experts as teachers and advisers to help train local film talents.

After the initial establishment of Yufeng and Hushan, Lin spent a huge amount of time and resources without much progress, while waiting for the arrival of advanced equipment. Yufeng did not produce its first feature film until 1959. *Brother A San Goes Out* (*A san ge chu ma*) was a comedy satirizing blind pursuit of money and fame, which was also Lin Tuanqiu's debut film. Nevertheless, it was heavily cut by the censors and failed miserably at the box office.

Yufeng had a few more productions with varied fates. For example, while Lin's second movie, *Lamenting Delicate Flowers* (*Tan yan hua*, 1959/1960), enjoyed some success, his co-directed film with Bai Ke, *Backstage* (*Hou tai*), was abandoned half-way through when both filmmakers realized that they might suffer from negative political consequences because of the film's subject matter. Another project, *The Husband's Secret* (*Zhangfu de mimi*, 1960), became very popular.

During the drought years at the end of the first wave of Taiwanese-language cinema between 1960 and 1962, Yufeng suspended productions and Hushan rented out its filmmaking facilities. The second wave of Taiwanese-language cinema rose again between 1962 and 1969, which offered Lin Tuanqiu an opportunity to write and direct *May 13th, Night of Sorrow* (*Wuyue shisan shangxin ye*) in 1965. Centering on an accidental love triangle and a murder, the film crafts a "coming of age" story of two

sisters with captivating intensity, along with several comic elements, beautiful songs, and a splendid local parade that aroused laughter and tears among local audiences.

Following the success of *May 13th*, Lin employed the same cast and adapted a Japanese film into *Six Suspects* (*Liuge xianyifan*, 1965). It was a gripping detective mystery of love affairs, greed and murder. Unfortunately, Lin was not satisfied with the finished product, and so *Six Suspects* never received a theatrical release even though it had passed censorship and several movie theatres had already confirmed screening dates. Lin's film companies thus suffered from a serious financial loss and this ended his filmmaking career.

Our 2020 Edition of “Taiwan’s Lost Commercial Cinema: Recovered and Restored” features three of Lin Tuanqiu’s films—*The Husband’s Secret*, *May 13th*, *Night of Sorrow*, and *Six Suspects*. We can see why Lin’s works are today recognised for their compelling stories, diverse camera movements, intricate psychological portraits of characters, and carefully designed mise-en-scène. To compare and contrast the differences and similarities between Lin Tuanqiu and another auteur filmmaker of the Taiwanese-language cinema, Xin Qi—three of whose films are also featured in our 2020 Edition—we begin to see the many fascinating facets of a once prosperous local film industry.

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