



Yufeng Motion Pictures  
Executive Producer: Chiu  
Mu (邱木)

Director: Lin Tuan-qiu (林  
搏秋)

Screenplay: Hong Xin-de  
(洪信德), Lin Yi-yun  
(林翼雲) aka Lin Tuan-  
qiu (林搏秋)

Cinematography: Lin  
Hong-zhong(林鴻鐘)

Sound: Lin Ding-gui (林丁  
貴)

Music: Zeng Zhong-ying  
(曾仲影)

Lyrics: Hong Xin-de (洪信  
德)

Editor: Shen Ye-kang (沈  
業康)

Cast:

Zhang Qingqing (張清清)

Chen Yun-qing (陳雲卿)

Chang Pan-yang (張潘陽)

1965

Black and White

97 minutes



# May 13th, Night of Sorrow

## 五月十三傷心夜

### Synopsis

After the death of their mother, Siok-hui sings in a nightclub to support her younger sister Siok-tshing, but her immature sister looks down on her occupation. Siok-tshing then begins working in a pharmaceutical company where she has a crush on her colleague Bun-pin. But little does she know that Bun-pin has fallen passionately in love with her sister. When she finally discovers the truth, she runs away and drowns her sorrows at a bar. There, a lascivious businessman who stalks her sister forces her to go with him to a hotel. Siok-hui rushes to the hotel, where she finds the man lying in a pool of blood...

### Commentary

Lin Tuan-qiu's films are a beautiful example of how moviemakers were attempting to discuss social, cultural and aesthetical issues in a context deemed to be pure escapism. The trajectory of the director himself is paradigm of the multicultural nature of Taiwanese society. Born into a wealthy family working in the coal mine industry, Lin Tuan-qiu studied in Japan where he worked in theatre and filmmaking. Back in Taipei, he funded the short-lived Yufeng Motion Pictures. Lin wanted to raise the standard of the *taiyupian* by adapting Japanese novels and films, such as *The 6 Suspects* and *The Husband's Secret*, while situating the action in contemporary Taiwan, thus providing what Tan Joe-Eng has called an "elusive and modern bourgeois japonisme." This refined vibe was rarely seen in *taiyupian*. He crafted elaborated psychological portraits intimately relevant to the local reality yet vibrating with an international, pan-Asian atmosphere.

*May 13th* alternates shots of beautiful landscapes with refined studio sequences of psychological portraits enhanced by elegant camera movements and jazzy montage. The required genre elements are all there: high pitched melodrama, sexual innuendo, violence and action

set pieces. The story of the two sisters re-stages the classic trope of the orphans, particularly relevant in the Taiwanese context. We can infer a political commentary where the “orphan syndrome” tells the narrative of the Republic of China itself, deserted by the Japanese, cut off from the mainland and under the influence of the United States.

The portrait of Siok-hui is a heartbreaking, highly melodramatic depiction of virtue stamped on by economic constraints and a hypocritical, patriarchal, consumerist society, which also corrupts Siok-tshing. The women can be understood as complicit with the repetition of the social mechanism of oppression, somehow reminding us of Eileen Chang’s characters in novels like *The Golden Cangue*. Lin offers a nuanced portrait of a globalised and westernised Taipei, with long sequences in a foggy night club, where whisky, cigars and jazz music entice and corrupt.

*May 13th* switches from melodramatic tones to comic elements, passing through musical sequences where the songs are expressions of feelings and internal struggles, and function as commentaries on the action itself. For the contemporary audience this pastiche and bricolage might appear chaotic, yet it is important to dwell in the complexity of references, styles and techniques that Lin was masterfully crafting.

Particularly impressive is the alternation of long musical parentheses with documentary pieces, for example the splendid, composite shots of a lion dance in the bustling streets of Taoyuan. Beautiful documentary shots of people, faces, clothes and market activities, or the majestic depictions of the ocean and the cliffs are thoroughly intercut with indoor Metropolis-like expressionist décor. The settings are plausible. This is quite different from other *taiyupian* classics, such as *Dangerous Youth* – which situates the action in far-away Hong Kong to shield the film from censorship. In contrast, Lin offers a precise topography where Taipei residents look down at the neighbouring, “backward” areas – while corrupting their youth and taking advantage of their orphan girls.

*May 13th* also offers a sharp commentary about the generation gap. The older generation is ready to critique the freedom and promiscuity of the young, but they are represented as conniving in the systematic exploitation of the less fortunate. The social and political commentary has to face censorship and slip through the cracks. Yet, when a young child is mimicking official propaganda by singing “Attack! Attack! Take China Back!,” it is hard not to see a disguised form of criticism towards repressive government indoctrination. Surely, this could not have passed unnoticed to the public of the time.

Eclectic, baroque, intricate, stylised and protean, *May 13th* is a precious addition to the catalogue of the restored “lost” commercial cinema, a cinema that can push all the emotional buttons via its high-pitched crying drama but also engage the intellect via subtle social and political criticism.