



Tailian Films

Director: Liang Zhefu (梁哲夫)

Screenplay: Jin Long (金龍)

Cinematography: Wang Jun (王濬) Wu Jia-Ju (吳家駒)

Sound: Wang Rong-fang (王榮芳)

Music: Li Guo-bao (李國寶)

Editors: Xiao Zhou (蕭舟)
Xiao Ai (蕭艾)

Cast:

Gao Ming (高鳴)

Liu Qing (柳青)

Ba Ke (巴戈)

Chin Tu (金塗)

1965

Black and White
83 minutes



Tarzan and the Treasure

泰山寶藏

Synopsis

During World War Two, two Japanese army soldiers, Fan from Macau and Zheng from Taiwan, observe the Japanese hiding treasure in the mountains of Malaya. They make a treasure map and keep half each. Later, Zheng's brother finds out Fan has died. The film opens when Zheng's brother goes to Macau to buy the other half of the map from his friend's descendants, having sent his niece Shufen (Liu Qing) and son (Ba Ke) to wait for him in Malaya with their half. But after a series of double-crossings and betrayals, Shufen and the boy set off to search for the treasure alone, with the Macau triads and the police in hot pursuit. At their moment of greatest danger in the jungle, the Taiwanese Tarzan (Gao Ming) swings onto the scene to save them.

Commentary

A riotous low-budget action-adventure film, *Tarzan and the Treasure* reveals the cosmopolitan dreams that raced feverishly through Taiwanese-language cinema. Macau and Kuala Lumpur appear as sophisticated dens of stylish iniquity, where gangsters in dark glasses and femme fatales in stiletto heels double-cross each other in the ruthless pursuit of glittering treasure. In contrast, Tarzan's highland jungle home is a world of primitive innocence but also the erotic exotic.

The film is profligate in its borrowings and mixes genres with abandon. Most obviously, it references the Johnny Weismuller and Maureen O'Sullivan Tarzan-and-Jane pic from 1941, *Tarzan's Secret Treasure* (directed by Richard Thorpe). Gao Ming, Liu Qing and Ba Ke form a Tarzan, Jane and Boy-style trio, and the villains are just as treacherous and avaricious in their pursuit of loot as in the original. But the inclusion of songs and girls in sarongs with hibiscus flowers in their hair might also invoke Elvis's *Blue Hawaii* (directed by Normal Taurog in 1961). The addition to the mix

of triads adds gangster films – including Japanese *yakuza* films, which were very popular in the 1960s – to action-adventure and musical genres.

However, when the Taiwanese-language cinema started in the 1950s, it was a decidedly local industry. Most of the producers were theatrical entrepreneurs, and they used the medium to make films based on the performances of their own local Taiwanese *koa-á-hì* (Mandarin: *gezaixi*, 歌仔戲) opera troupes. The first major box office hit was *Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan* (薛平貴與王寶釧), a film directed in 1956 by He Jiming (何基明). Its success triggered a spate of local Taiwanese-language opera films.

However, even in the late 1950s, the seeds of a more cosmopolitan vision were sprouting. Plays that came out of the Taiwan New Drama movement were also adapted. The latter originated during the Japanese colonial era and drew on its Japanese counterpart, but emphasized contemporary stories performed in Taiwanese. Lin Tuan-qiu, one of the directors featured in this 2020 edition of Taiwan's Lost Commercial Cinema, was deeply involved in that movement.

In the 1960s, the old tendency to record stage productions gave way to a genre cinema that borrowed freely. In our 2017 edition, *The Best Secret Agent* was not only a remake of an old Shanghai film from the late 1940s, but also a tribute to the Bond movies that were so popular in the 1960s. Indeed, there were numerous Taiwanese-language "007" films. Lin Tuan-qiu transposed Japanese novels and films into the Taiwanese context, and Xin Qi, also featured in our 2020 edition, adapted a recently published British gothic novel for his film, *The Bride Who Returned from Hell*, included in the 2017 edition.

Action-adventure films like the Tarzan movies and more recently the *Indiana Jones* series have been criticized for propagating Orientalist fantasies about Africa as a primitive playground to be looted. Perhaps similar charges could be levelled at *Tarzan and the Treasure's* fantasy image of Southeast Asia? And because the treasure and the map to it comes from the colonial era, does seeking the Japanese treasure indicate a desire on the part of some of the formerly colonized Taiwanese to inherit the mantle of their former colonizer?

Unlike Johnny Weismuller, Gao Ming, who plays Tarzan in the film, was a versatile actor who performed in numerous films in different genres. After the end of the Taiwanese-language cinema, he went on to have an illustrious television career. Director Liang Zhefu was also prolific and versatile. *Tarzan and the Treasure* was only one of nine films he directed in 1965. Born in China, he migrated to Hong Kong and got his start in the film industry there, before moving to Taiwan in 1957. His *Early Train from Taipei* was in our 2017 edition, and as the Taiwanese-language industry went into decline, he moved over into Mandarin films for the later part of his career.