

## Asian 204

### Unit 04: Street Angel

#### **Street Angel: Basic Information**

Chinese Title: *Malu tianshi* 馬路天使

Date of Release: 1937

Production Company: Mingxing (Shanghai)

Director: Yuan Muzhi

Screenplay: Yuan Muzhi

#### CAST:

- Xiao Hong (played by Zhou Xuan): a singsong girl who has been sold to a musician in Shanghai after fleeing her native Manchuria following the Japanese invasion.
- Xiao Yun (played by Zhao Huishen): Xiao Hong's "older sister," who has been forced to become a street walker by the same couple who own Xiao Hong.
- Chen Shaoping (played by Zhao Dan): A poverty-stricken trumpet player who lives across the alley. Chen's male friends, with whom he has sworn a pact of brotherhood, include a motley cast of working-class characters, including a barber, a fruit seller and a man with a speech impediment who is unemployed.
- Wang, the Newspaper Seller (played by Wei Heling): Chen's best friend, who is partial to Xiao Yun and has a penchant for newspaper clippings.

The above information is taken from Andrew F. Jones' complete translation of the screenplay, available at the Modern Chinese Literature and Culture Web Site:

<http://mcllc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/angel/default.htm>

## **Historical Background**

### **I. Previous Milestones (review)**

- 1912: Establishment of Republic of China
- 1912-1916: Presidency of Yuan Shikai
- 1916-1928: The Warlord era

### **II. The Nationalist Party (Guomindang/GMD/KMT)**

- Founded by Sun Yatsen in 1912
- Begins building power base in Guangdong
- General Chiang Kaishek succeeds to Nationalist leadership after Sun's death in 1925

### **III. The Chinese Communist party (CCP)**

- Russian Revolution of 1917
- Appeal of Marxism and Communism in China
- Chinese Communist Party founded July 1921 in Shanghai
  - Chen Duxiu (publisher of New Youth) among founders
- Comintern (Communist International) activities
  - Organizational aid to both Nationalists and Communists
  - Encouraging Nationalist-Communist Alliance

### **IV. Some Crude Definitions**

- **Socialism:** a doctrine or system in which the society as a collective—not particular individuals—controls the distribution of wealth and power
- **Marxism:** theories of human society and history based on the socialist thought of German political philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883)
- **Communism:** an ideology and political movement that envisions a classless society based on common ownership of the means of production
- **The Communist Party:** a political organization dedicated to realizing the communist ideal

## V. The Northern Expedition and the Nanjing Decade

- The Northern Expedition 1926-1928
  - Military campaign to reunite China
  - Led by Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek
- Establishment of Nationalist government in Nanjing, 1928
- Nanjing Decade, 1928-1937

## VI. Nationalists and Communists, 1926-1937

- Alliance (First United Front) at start of Northern Expedition
- Nationalists' 1927 anti-Communist coup
- Communists go underground, build rural base
  - The Jiangxi Soviet
- The Long March, 1934-1935
  - New Communist base in Yanan (Shaanxi)
  - Mao Zedong (1893-1976) emerges as leader

## VII. Literature and the Arts in the Nanjing Decade: The Radicalization of the Arts

- Reaction against Nationalist domestic policies
  - Promotion of traditional values
  - Censorship
  - Repression of political rivals
- The threat from Japan
  - Seizure of Manchuria, 1931
  - Nationalist "appeasement"
- Communist organizing in the arts
  - Calls for a proletarian art (art of/for the masses)
  - Use of traditional arts in countryside
  - League of Left-Wing Writers, 1930
  - League of Leftist Performing Artists, 1931
  - "Left-Wing Cinema"
    - Films made 1932-1937 and 1946-1949 influenced by socialist and Communist ideas