

## Asian 204, Summer 2010 Q04

### Street Angel: Discussion Questions

We will be watching the 1937 film *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*) in class on Thursday 7/1 and Friday 7/2. The film is in Chinese, without English subtitles. Before coming to class to watch the film please read through the translation of the screenplay available on the web:

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

### Discussion Questions for *Street Angel*

Read through these questions before reading the screenplay and watching the film. Jot down ideas and notes on details or scenes you think are relevant.

1. Like several of the works we have looked at already in the course, *Street Angel* tells the story of two couples. What are the situations and occupations of Xiao Chen (Chen Xiaoping), Lao Wang, Xiao Hong, and Xiao Yun at the beginning of the movie? What parallels and contrasts are there among the four individuals, the two couples, and the development of their relationships?
2. In what ways do the film's characters, story line, setting, imagery, individual scenes, etc. fit conventional expectations for a romance story? What elements are there that seem to go *against* romantic conventions?
3. Recall what you know of China's national situation in the mid-1930s, from lecture or your own prior knowledge. What aspects of the film reflect this situation?
4. What aspects of society does the film criticize, and how? Does it suggest any solutions to the social problems it portrays?
5. How many scenes or sequences in the film involve music? What relationships do you see among the various musical scenes?
6. What roles does music play in the world depicted in the film (the *diegetic* roles of music)? What roles does music play in the film as a film; that is, what does it offer to the film's audience (the *extradiegetic* roles of music)?

**Pickowicz, "Melodramatic Representation and the 'May Fourth' Tradition of Chinese Cinema"**

This article includes only a brief discussion of *Street Angel*. Its overall aim is to point out continuities between Chinese films of the pre- and post-Mao eras. In doing so it refers to many films with which you may be unfamiliar. Your aim in reading the article should be to try to grasp the main thread of the author's argument, and to think about how it applies to *Street Angel*. You should also keep the author's argument in mind as we watch other films later in the course. Be prepared to discuss these questions in class on Tuesday 7/6.

1. What are the periods into which Pickowicz divides mainland Chinese film? What distinguishes the periods from one another? What period does *Street Angel* belong to?

2. Why might it be strange to speak of a "May Fourth tradition" in Chinese film? In what sense does Pickowicz think such a term is justified or useful?

3. What is "melodrama"?

4. What is the relationship between "melodrama" and the "May Fourth tradition" in Chinese film? How does Pickowicz see this relationship as changing across different periods? Does the idea of such a relationship provide a useful way of thinking about *Street Angel*? How?