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| **Spring in a Small Town (1948)** |
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| *Spring in a Small Town* (*Xiǎochéng zhī chūn*), directed by Fei Mu (1906-1951), is one of the classics from the second golden age of Chinese cinema between 1946 and 1949. The film is set in 1946 — when China’s full-scale civil war resumed, only a year after World War II — and gives voice to Chinese citizens’ growing resistance to endless war and political turmoil. It tells the story of an estranged couple, Yuwen and her sick husband, Liyan, in a declining intellectual elite family. Their life is disturbed by Zhichen, a doctor of Western medicine, who is Liyan’s old friend and Yuwen’s former lover. His visit to the couple’s rundown mansion — a space that represents the postwar social landscape — provokes them to rethink the meanings of love, family, and responsibility. At the end of the film, Zhichen leaves, and the couple’s life goes on amidst the ruins. The film leaves it open as to how their marriage will develop.  File: Screen\_capture\_1\_Spring\_in\_a\_Small\_Town.jpg  Carolyn FitzGerald suggests that Fei Mu reveals ‘a cultural impasse’ that modern China faced in the post-World War II era, ‘the result of a lack of faith in Westernized modernity [represented by Zhichen] and an inability to return to a past that has been reduced to ruins’ (215). However, visually, the film does not leave such a gap between the ‘modern’ West and the ‘old’ China. The director’s insistence on realistic settings, lyrical long takes, and expressive high contrast lighting echoes Italian neorealism and American film noir. And, as many scholars like Susan Daruvala, Cheuk-to Li, and FitzGerald also argue, the film — in its acting, its dialogue, and its deployment of mise-en-scène — is at the same time deeply rooted in traditional Chinese aesthetics inherited from literature, painting, and theatre.  File: Director\_Fei\_Mu.jpg  File: Screen\_capture\_2\_Spring\_in\_a\_Small\_Town.jpg |
| Further reading:  (Daruvala)  (FitzGerald)  (Li)  (Pickowicz)  (Udden)  (Wu) |