CAI, Chusheng (January 12, 1906—July 15, 1968)

Cai Chusheng was a Chinese film director and screenwriter and a leading figure in the Chinese progressive [*jinbu*] cinema of the 1930s and 1940s. His oeuvre includes *Yú guāng qǔ* [*Song of the Fishermen*, 1934], the first Chinese film ever to win an international award, and *Yī jiāng chūn shuǐ xiàng dōng liú* [*The Spring River Flows East*, 1947], which was the highest grossing film in the 1940s. Cai’s life and career were parallel to and embedded in the most turbulent period of modern Chinese history. Western colonization, the second Sino-Japanese War, and the Chinese Civil War left the traditional Chinese social order in total ruin. Through filmmaking, Cai took part in intense discussions over the reconstruction of modern China. His elaboration of modernity, however, proved to be conflicted and unsettled, a condition that paradoxically reflected the unique form of modernization in China, which negotiated collective national identity through class struggle and the proletarian revolution. In his films, we often observe that his protagonists’ devotion to the suffering masses cannot be reconciled with their individual or even bourgeois sentimentality; their patriotic life fails to transcend their unfulfilled desire, and/or their creation of a new future is hindered by the resurrection of a traumatic past. Yet, because of these contradictions, his films are at once earthy and poetic and his characters strong and yet vulnerable. Cai’s great honesty about the complexity of human motivation shines through, and his characters’ humanism emerges from behind the propaganda about national salvation and reliance on a strong notion of collectivism.

**References and further reading:**

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**List of works:**

*Nán guó zhī chūn* (*Spring in the South,* 1932)

*Gòng fù guó nàn* (*Facing the National Crisis*, 1932)

*Fěn hóng sè dè mèng* (*Pink Dream*, 1932)

*Dū huì* *dè* *zǎo chén* (*Dawn Over the Metropolis*, 1933)

*Yú guāng qǔ* (*Song of the Fishermen*, 1934)

*Xīn nǚ xìng* (*New Women*, 1935)

*Mí tú dè gāo yáng* (*Lost Lambs*, 1936)

*Wáng lǎo wǔ* (*Fifth Brother Wang*, 1937)

*Gū dǎo tiān táng* (*Orphan Island Paradise*, 1939)

*Qián chéng wàn lǐ* (*Boundless Future*, 1941)

*Yī jiāng chūn shuǐ xiàng dōng liú* (*The Spring River Flows East*, 1947),

*Nán hǎi cháo* (1963)

**Paratextual material:**

Images:



Figure 1 Cai Chusheng



Figure 2 Screen Capture from Song of the Fishermen

Figure 3 Spring Water Flows West Screen Capture

**Links:**

Cai Cusheng at the Internet Movie Database <http://www.dianying.com/en/person/CaiChusheng>

Cai Cusheng at 中国电影资料库 (zhongguo dianying zeliao ku) <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0161529/>

Essay by Chris Berry on the Chinese leftist cinema of the 1930s <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC34folder/30sLeftChinaFilms.html>

Introduction to China’s Modern History

<https://www.modernhistoryofchina.com/Home_Page.html>

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/timelines/china_modern_timeline.htm>

Funing Tang University of Miami