

2000 电影《幸福时光》笔记

- Zhang Yimou's film, as a social commentary on Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening going strong in its twentieth year, seems to replicate Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931) in more than one way. The poignancy of Chaplin's film is part of his mature vision of and great insight into America's gilded age coming to an end in a period known as the Great Depression. If Chaplin tried to expose the bleak realities of the American poor being ignored by the rich, then Zhang Yimou's film shone a light on China's lost generation fading away as the nation marched into its gilded phase of market society in triumphalism.
- In both films there is a blind girl who is blessed for not being able to see the darkness of her situation. That she survives her misfortune is because of an invisible hand to protect her from the harms of brutal competition and personal struggles. In both films, there is also a tramp pretending to be rich only to help those in need but treated everywhere with indifference and callousness.
- What is being focused on in these films is a national crisis in which people living in a prosperous society try to look the other way while those unable to fend for themselves fall through the cracks. China's golden age under Deng is not unlike the U.S. at the turn of last century; the economic boom, the railways, the technological advances, etc. carried the nation to a new-found land, a new frontier to be crossed.
- The bond between Wu Ying—Old Zhao (and his friends in retirement) creates an oasis of socialism in the vast desert of free market economy. In this regard, the film(s) is no more nor less than a Marxist critique of Western modernity that the French writer Balzac tried long ago in his novels that “. . . might constitute the only great literary expression of the world as structured by the conscious values of the bourgeoisie: individualism, the thirst for power, money, and eroticism, which triumph over the ancient feudal values of altruism, charity, and love”
- Gone are the days of Lei Feng when people seemed kind to one another. One can argue that, ideologically speaking, the PRC is reverting to its founding principles as a communist state: equality, brotherhood, one for all and all for one. The film is a swan song for socialism. With Old Zhao gone and Wu Ying pushed to the road side, a libidinal economy is in full view, driven by a thirst for private property and wealth.
- The theories of Hegel and Marx seem vindicated when we realize the dialectic of social progress in place: thesis→antithesis→synthesis→thesis. As the premodern society is destroyed, a new political order came into existence. Now that new theory (of socialism) is once again challenged by a newer system: state capitalism
- As a beneficiary of Reform and Opening, Zhang Yimou can perhaps be more nuanced and less romantic about failed socialism in China that cannot sustain itself. Marx's critique of capitalism needs to take into consideration China's rise that has lifted millions out of poverty. Old Zhao dies an untimely death, unmarried and broke. His unhappiness signals the dawn of a new age when the state set people free to take care of themselves, *for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.*”