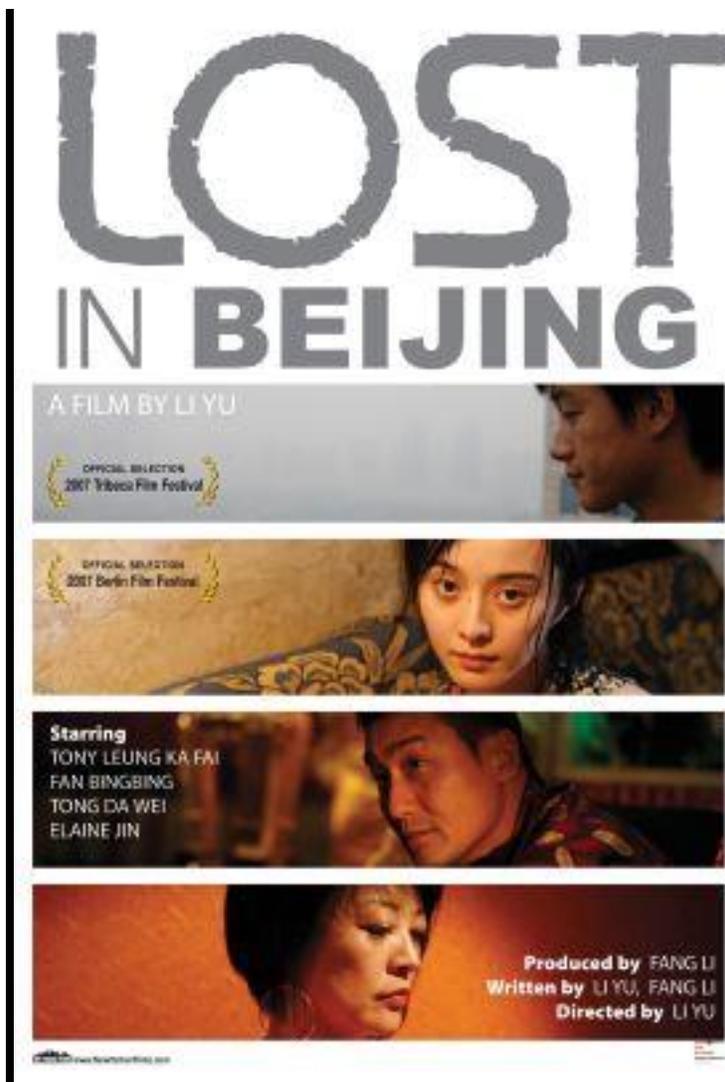


Lost in Beijing (苹果; Pingguo; 2007, Li Yu director)

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The film *Lost in Beijing* (2007, commercial release 2008) is mainly focused on the lives of four people. They form two married couples, and in the film, their lives collide. Liu Pingguo ('Apple' Liu) and her husband, An Kun, are a young migrant couple from the northeast of China. They have moved to Beijing in search of a better life. They live in a dilapidated apartment. Apple (which is also the Chinese name of the film) and An Kun have very humble, marginal jobs. Apple is a foot massage parlour masseuse, and An Kun is a high-rise building window cleaner. They are the 'have-nots' in contemporary China. The other couple are the 'haves': Lin Dong (a migrant to Beijing from Guangdong province, in the south of China) and his wife Wang Mei (who practices Chinese medicine with some degree of commercial success). They are childless and approaching middle age. But they are part of China's new class of nouveau riche. Lin owns the Golden Basin Foot Massage Palace, drives a Mercedes, wears a Rolex watch, and can afford to hire expensive prostitutes. One afternoon he rapes one of his masseuses – 'Apple' -- who was quite drunk at the time of the assault, and therefore in a weakened state. Part of the rape is witnessed by Liu's husband, An Kun, who just happened at that very moment to be cleaning (from outside the building) the windows of the room in which the rape was taking place. Angered by the boss and his wife, An Kun seeks compensation for *his* mental distress as a wronged husband. Lin's wife, Wang Mei, joins forces with him so as to seek revenge, and they then become lovers. Apple discovers she is pregnant but cannot be sure whether the father is Lin Dong or Wang Mei. Lin wants to buy the child, Wang agrees but only on certain onerous conditions, and An Kun decides that Apple should keep the child so that it can be sold to Lin Dong. But after the birth An Kun grows attached to the child, his son, and wants to keep it himself. In a final scene, Apple walks out on both of them, taking with her money and child and presumably a renewed search for a new -- and this time -- more autonomous life.



LI Yu, the director

Ms. Li, a former Chinese Central TV presenter, is well known in China for her embrace of social realism, arguing that in the context of China today, movies can capture China's social realities better than news broadcasts. Her determination to be a film director also followed on from advice urged on her from within the film business that since she has a pretty female face she should develop her cinematic career as an actress – advice which she rejected. Her first feature film, 'Fish & Elephant', dealt with a homosexual relationship, still a very sensitive issue in China today.

See also:

<http://www.timeout.com/london/film/fish-and-elephant>

KRAICER, Shelly (2002) Review of 'Fish & Elephant', at <http://www.chinesecinemas.org/fishandelephant.html>

Among the more interesting dimensions of Chinese law and society touched on in *Lost in Beijing* are ...

Rural to urban migration

The CCP (Chinese Communist Party) tells Chinese citizens that they may now dream of economic success (but not yet hope for significant political change). For many citizens living outside China's main urban centres, migration to a large city such as Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou in search of employment and a new way of life is probably the most important way of realizing this new Chinese dream. In the days of Mao Zedong's control (from Liberation in 1949 to his death in 1976) cities were seen in occidentalist terms as subversive sites of western decadence, and in order to control the flow of migrants to the cities a system of household registration was put in place in the 1950s. This created a system of internal domicile that severely restricted freedom of movement, especially rural to urban migration. The system has not been abolished, even though there are now looser controls in place and these do permit significantly greater freedom to move to the cities. The loosening of controls was carried out in order to facilitate economic reforms, though its incompleteness creates inequalities and forms of discrimination – for example, problems in obtaining public services such as health care and schooling for children on an equal basis with other residents – about which many commentators within China are unhappy. And the drift to the cities in search of employment means that in many families there is a problem of the fate of the children who are left behind. Of course, not everybody who moves to the city is successful, as *Lost in Beijing* shows: the older couple are wealthy entrepreneurs, while the younger couple are clearly working class, and likely to remain so.

See, for example:

'A Call for Reform of China's Household Registration System,' *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (JUNE 2010), pp. 405-407 [JStor]

TIEZZI, Shannon (2016) 'China's Plan for 'Orderly' Hukou Reform: China wants to grant hukous to 100 million migrants by 2020, but will be slow and selective in its reform,' at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/chinas-plan-for-orderly-hukou-reform/>

Aspirations, officially speaking: harmonious and collective

So the search for a better life is thus mainly seen (officially) as a search for more money. But not only is this a limited vision of 'the good life' but it is a search that takes place in a distinctive ideological context. Since the film was released in 2007/8, China has been officially promoting the notion of a 'harmonious society', and more latterly the ideal of a 'Chinese dream' (presumably paralleling the visions of Martin Luther King). Unfortunately, there is not a great deal of harmony to be found in the social realities of China today, and the CCP's promotion of the idea of a Chinese dream is largely based on the idea that this is to be a collective dream only – one of China's renewal to greatness. For the individual, if there is to be any dreaming, it has to be done in the social context of an increasingly materialist society, in which there is much social conflict and alienation, and where collective visions are increasingly resisted. On Chinese dreaming see, for example,

TEH Yvonne (2014) 'Film review: bespoke satirical comedy in *Personal Tailor*,' 23 Jan 2014, at <http://www.scmp.com/magazines/48hrs/article/1407765/film-review-bespoke-satirical-comedy-personal-tailor>

Sexual Violence & Gender

Chinese laws, including laws governing family relations, are very moralistic and often patriarchal in nature. In *Lost in Beijing* there are a number of scenes of a sexual nature, including a graphic rape of the heroine, the opening scenes when a prostitute visits the

massage parlour boss, and parts where the massage parlour owner's wife is in bed with a lover (the heroine 'Apple's' husband). But Chinese censors cut many of these passages. Throughout the film there is a sense of foreboding about the possible fate of the women portrayed in the movie, reflecting the fact that violence against women is a serious issue in China. Apple's good friend in the massage parlour, the naive Xiao Mei, is indeed murdered later on in the film.

See also:

'Outcome of Deng Yujiao Case Encourages Some, Alarms Others,' (2009) at:
<http://duihua.org/wp/?p=2766>

Family planning

China's family planning system is also gender discriminatory, imposing the majority of burdens on women. The film does not deal very convincingly with the fact that Apple gives birth outside the planning system, which is usually quite severe in its treatment of migrants who evade family planning rules. But the film does capture effectively the obsession of men with producing sons – sons who will then continue the family's ancestral descent line. An additional reason for the drive to give birth to sons is that in the countryside it is likely that upon marriage the bride will move to her husband's household, so that the married couple will be in a position to help support the groom's parents in their old age. In *Lost in Beijing* the viewer gets the feeling that if the child to whom Apple gives birth was a daughter, the rapist father would not have shown nearly so much interest in the child.

See also:

<http://www.economist.com/news/china/21677273-china-has-abandoned-its-more-35-year-old-one-child-policy-now-couples-can-have-two-china>

The grundnorm of the Chinese legal system

According to the Preamble of the 1982 Constitution of the PRC, the CCP exercises leadership over the Chinese legal system. And while China does ‘practice’ a multi-party political system, there is only one party – the CCP – that counts. The practical effect of this is that it is the CCP which defines truth in Chinese society today. Much follows from this. So, in the case of *Lost in Beijing*, one problem was that the film was released in the run up to the Beijing Olympics 2008, and the CCP felt uncomfortable about the film because it challenged the ‘beautiful Beijing’ image that was being strongly promoted by the Chinese Party-State at that time. One of the main problems with this approach to the definition of truth in Chinese society – in which the CCP always has the final say in defining the situation – is, however, that policies and laws can’t easily adjust to China’s social realities, so that problems often fester rather than get dealt with. So, in the case of Beijing, the city is even less ‘beautiful’ than it was in 2008.

See also:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/china-slaps-filmmaking-ban-on-producers-of-lost-in-beijing-1.757115>

<http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/dec/16/beijing-airpocalypse-city-almost-uninhabitable-pollution-china>

Further reading on Chinese Cinema:

BERRY, Chris (2004) “Introduction: towards a post socialist cinema,” Chapter 1, pp. 1-21, in his *Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China: The Cultural Revolution after the Cultural Revolution*, Routledge: New York and London