A China Film Series Includes Weibo Celebrity Han Han and The VaChina Monologues
By Doug Cummings
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Categories: Film And TV

China is increasingly recognized as the largest film market outside the United States, but Los Angeles has long been ahead of the curve in mounting rare programs devoted to the country’s cinematic riches. The latest example is the nearly monthlong China Onscreen Biennial, running Oct. 17-Nov. 14, which will offer a slate of classic and new films and media presented by the UCLA Confucius Institute at venues such as UCLA Film & Television Archive, REDCAT, Pomona College and AFI Fest.

It’s a highly curated affair that emphasizes variety, from filmmaker Ann Hui’s The Golden Era (2014), a lush and sweeping biopic about the famed writer Xiao Hong and her turbulent life in 1930s China, to Stratum 1: The Visitors (2013), a witty digital video work that follows two young men walking and reminiscing through an abandoned neighborhood as it’s being razed. Animated and live action shorts and specially-commissioned art slideshows will add flavor.

Yet the program is less a tribute to a foreign country than an embrace of its contemporary relevance. The Continent (2014) is the feature debut of Han Han, a literary celebrity, race car driver and king of social media — he has 40 million followers on Weibo, China’s equivalent of Twitter. The coming-of-age drama Nezha (2014) presents two rebellious high school girls who grapple with teen angst and a culture in transition.

A spotlight on “Wild Women” features a fake television broadcast culled from a masseuse’s video diary; the mockumentary Female Directors (2014), which probes the lives of unemployed art school grads; and The VaChina Monologues (2014), which documents many of the public spaces (schools, cafes, streets) in China where Eve Ensler’s play has been performed.
Of particular interest to cinephiles is a tribute to Wu Tianming (who died earlier this year), whose *A River Without Buoys* (1982) and subsequent role as studio head set the stage for the new wave (“Fifth Generation”) of filmmakers (Tian Zhuangzhuang, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou) that stunned the festival circuit in the late-1980s. It’s a mark of the East-West cultural divide that this pivotal figure in world cinema was reduced to running a video store in Monterey Park in the 1990s; initiatives such as the COB go a long way to unearthing the treasures in our midst.


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