



Wed 22
- Sun 26
March 2023
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HIPPODROME
silent film festival
celebrating film with live music

SUN 26 MARCH | 14:00

Volcanic Passions (Loving Blood of the Volcano)

Dir. Sun Yu | China | 1932 | N/C PG | 1h 35m

With: Li Lili, Zheng Junli Tang Tianxiu, Liu Jiqun, Yuan Congmei, Shi Juefei, Gao Weilian, Han Langen

Screening material courtesy of the China Film Archive

Performing Live: Stephen Horne (Piano, Flute, Accordion)

Presented in partnership with the Confucius Institute for Scotland at the
University of Edinburgh

Although the technology to make sound films had reached China by the start of the 1930s, the production of silent films continued for a number of years. *Volcanic Passions*, one of the extant films from the period, is a powerful political melodrama produced by Shanghai's legendary Lianhua Film Studio. Set in the mid-1920s, when much of China was ruled by violent and competing warlord groups, it tells a passionate story that features an unusual fusion of idyllic rural life, sensuality and seduction, and fiery political agitation.

Unlike most silent-era Chinese films set in the flashy metropolis of Shanghai, *Volcanic Passions* portrays bucolic charms of a Chinese village and exotic flavours of a tropical land. As one of its intertitles reveals, the tropical land is located in a distant foreign country across the ocean, with 'a volcano, women, red wine, strapping bodies, naked hearts' that disturb the anguished hero's psyche. The European colonies in Southeast Asia are perhaps insinuated here. Known as *Nanyang* in Chinese at the time, Southeast Asia had a large population of Chinese immigrants. It was a lucrative market for the Shanghai film industry throughout the 1910s to the 1940s, because of its economic strength under Western colonial rule and a solid Chinese diasporic audience base. At

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the same time, in narratives of Chinese nationalism, Nanyang assumed a negative image – as the epitome of depraved colonial culture. *Volcanic Passions* offers us a rare glimpse of how Nanyang was caricatured and imagined in a compellingly visual way.

Volcanic Passions also marks the beginning of the remarkable collaborations between the director Sun Yu and the actress Li Lili. Sun Yu was one of the most accomplished filmmakers in China in the early 1930s and enjoyed a mass following. Sun had studied theatre and film in the USA at the University of Wisconsin and Columbia in the 1920s. He understood the many appeals of Hollywood melodramas and their preoccupation with the titillating dynamics of sex and violence. Sun never intended to offer up realistic characters. Evil is not just evil, it must be sadistic and diabolical. And good is not just good, it must be selfless and even masochistic.

The talented actress Li Lili gave Sun Yu's silver dream a tangible shape. Contrary to the delicate, frail type of feminine beauty (exemplified by the iconic star Ruan Lingyu), Li Lili was vivacious, robust, glowing with energy. Li was born in 1915 in Beijing, whose father was to become an underground Communist and secret agent. She joined a dance troupe in Shanghai at the age of twelve and soon thrived as a rising star. Her film career was facilitated by her dancing and athletic gift. During the golden years of the pre-war Shanghai film industry, Li made thirteen films for the Lianhua Studio, creating a new ideal of femininity that matched the collective Chinese aspiration for a stronger nation. *Volcanic Passions* was the opening chapter of her glamorous acting career.

XUELEI HUANG

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