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Wang Chao's "Luxury Car": A Rare Look at the Reality of Post-Mao China



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Chinese director Wang Chou's *Luxury Car*, (*Voiture de luxe*), is a deeply moving and a shocking film, deeply moving for the craft with which Chou tells his story, shocking because the film ends up not merely being an allegory of a failed revolution, (which really wouldn't be much of a surprise), but because it is so deeply critical of what China has become that it strongly suggests that China's failure to hold onto its communist ideology

represents a profound loss for its people. Viewers of Eastern European cinema have become accustomed to what has been labelled "soviet nostalgia." Chou's indictment goes further than most of the work in that genre. This is a *film noir* whose darkness grows out of the garish, almost obscenent neon glitter that Chou allows to stand for the new China.

The shock a Western viewer experiences after viewing such a work seems, on reflection, somewhat ingenuous. Among China's enormous population, it should probably come as no surprise that there are more than a few citizens who would agree with Chou's vision. One can only speculate on how many Chinese are sympathetic to Chou's point of view. Nevertheless, we here in the West do not often gain exposure to such work and it does make one wonder about the present Chinese government's letting this film be shown at all, either domestically or abroad. (The film was given a *Prix un certain regard* at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival.) The admittedly small American audience who might wish to see this film have CUNY TV's *City Cinematheque* to thank for the opportunity.

City Cinematheque, presided over by City College Professor Jerry Carlson, is a jewel in the programming crown of the City University of New York's public television outlet, known here in New York as CUNY TV 75. The show and its host deserve enormous praise for delivering to its following (which one can only hope is growing) films that are outstanding either because they are of great importance in the history of film, or because they give us rare insight into the cinemas of other nations. As Professor Carlson would no doubt himself admit, the show serves the valuable function the many art theaters that once graced the

