



TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

SUNDAY
FEBRUARY 11, 2018
2:00PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

THE WEDDING BANQUET

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



"I'm pretty sure the male kissing scene is the first one in Taiwanese cinema. The audience were very quiet during that, but then it was alright. Traditional values are breaking apart in Taiwan and so people are trying to find different values and multiple values are becoming acceptable. This film came just in time to break the barrier."

—Ang Lee, 1993

Before his 2005 *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN* proved gay romances could be critical and commercial powerhouses on screens around the world, and before his 2000 *CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON* did the same for films in Mandarin, Ang Lee gave us the poignant, perceptive romantic/domestic comedy *THE WEDDING BANQUET*. While its impact is often overshadowed by his blockbusters that followed, it was nonetheless barrier-breaking for its time in bringing engaging and authentic stories of Chinese-American and gay characters to mainstream audiences, and in establishing Lee's reputation as a transnational director who could also break barriers between the arthouse and the multiplex.



The film centers, at least initially, on Wai-Tung, played by Winston Chao in his screen debut, a gay Taiwanese immigrant living in Greenwich Village with his American partner Simon, played by Mitchell Lichtenstein (son of Roy). May Chin, a TV and pop star in Taiwan at the time and now a member of Taiwan's legislature, portrays the couple's mainland Chinese immigrant friend in need of a green card. Rounding out the core cast are esteemed Taiwanese film stars Sihung Lung and Ah-Leh Gua in the roles of Wai-Tung's parents.

Lee himself immigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan in 1979 at age 24, first studying theater at UIUC, and then earning an MFA in film production at NYU where he was a classmate of Spike Lee (no relation). Although he was signed by William Morris in 1984 on the strength of his student work, his directing career faltered. Then, in 1990, on the verge of leaving the field, he entered his spec scripts *PUSHING HANDS* and *THE WEDDING BANQUET* in a screenwriting contest run by the Taiwanese government, and they took first and second prize. These were developed into Lee's first two feature films and the first films in his "Father Knows Best" trilogy, which also includes his third feature, 1994's *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN*. All three films star Sihung Lung, and all had final shooting scripts that were co-written with frequent Lee collaborator and former Yale instructor James Schamus.

The first draft of *THE WEDDING BANQUET* was written by Lee and Neil Peng, and it is based on the life of one of their friends. Lee added numerous details from his own life and family, including the shambolic City Hall wedding (complete with the crying mother) and, most importantly, the dynamic between father and son. After Schamus came on board as a writer and co-producer, he and Lee adapted the script into a modern blend of Hollywood screwball "comedies of remarriage" of the 30s and 40s and Chinese melodramas of the 40s and 50s. Schamus described the film as "first drafted in Chinese, then translated into English, re-written in English, translated back into Chinese, and eventually subtitled in Chinese and English and a dozen other languages."

THE WEDDING BANQUET won the Golden Bear in Berlin, and garnered Golden Globe and Academy Award nominations for Best Foreign Language Film. A surprise commercial hit as well, it was produced for less than a million dollars—less than 1/30 the cost of an average Hollywood film of the era—but earned 23.6 million in worldwide gross. According to *Variety*, this made *THE WEDDING BANQUET* the most profitable film of the year on a cost-to-return ratio, making it nearly twice as profitable dollar-for-dollar than the year's runner-up, *JURASSIC PARK*.

DIRECTED BY **ANG LEE**
WRITTEN BY **ANG LEE, NEIL PENG, AND JAMES SCHAMUS**
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **JONG LIN**
PRODUCED BY **ANG LEE PICTURES**
(1993) 106 MINS.
STARRING **WINSTON CHAO, MAY CHIN, AH-LEH GUA, MITCHELL LICHTENSTEIN, AND SIHUNG LUNG**

DID YOU KNOW: THOUGH LEE INITIALLY SET OUT TO BE AN ACTOR, HE RARELY CASTS HIMSELF IN HIS OWN FILMS. *THE WEDDING BANQUET* IS AN EXCEPTION. WATCH FOR HIM IN THE BANQUET SCENE AS THE GUEST WHO SAYS, "YOU'RE WITNESSING THE RESULTS OF 5,000 YEARS OF SEXUAL REPRESSION!" ALSO, WATCH FOR HIS SON MASON AS THE BABY JUMPING ON THE BED.

NEXT UP: DIRECTOR DUDLEY MURPHY'S PRE-CODE ADAPTATION OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S *THE EMPEROR JONES* STARS THE MAGNETIC PAUL ROBESON AS BRUTUS JONES, A PULLMAN PORTER, IMPRISONED FOR MURDER, WHO ESCAPES AND SETS HIMSELF UP AS THE "EMPEROR" OF A CARIBBEAN ISLAND. A 35MM PRINT OF THE 2002 LIBRARY OF CONGRESS RESTORATION SCREENS **WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14 AT 7:00 PM.**