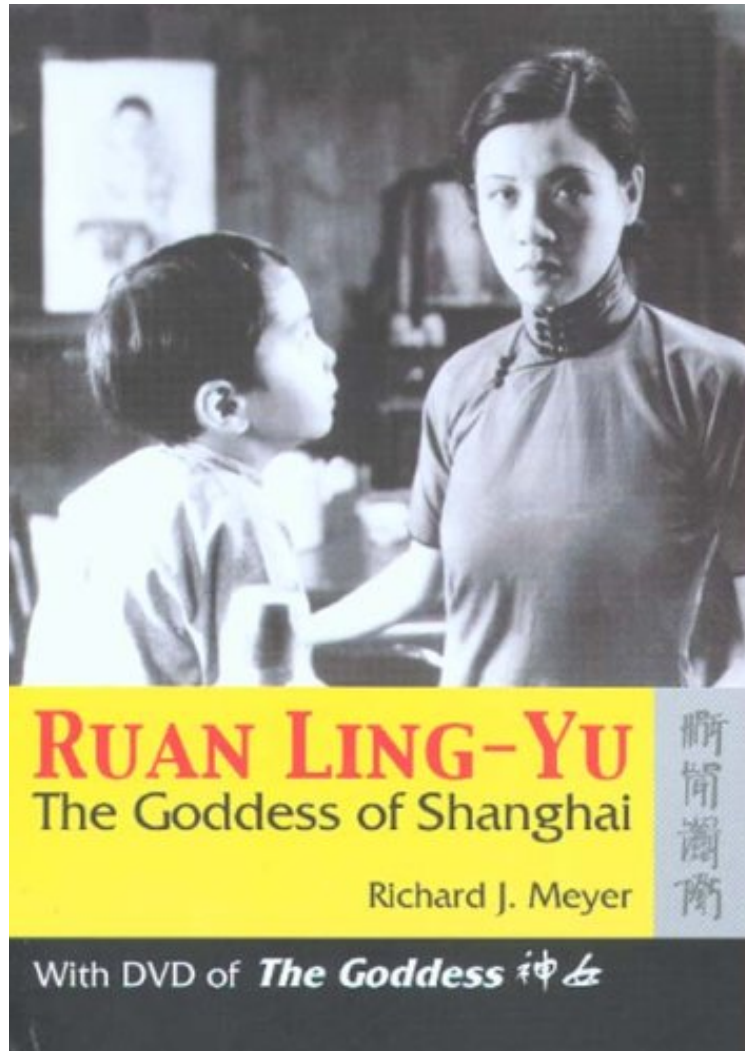


Ruan Ling-Yu: The Goddess of Shanghai

Richard Meyer

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Richard Meyer : Ruan Ling-Yu: The Goddess of Shanghai before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ruan Ling-Yu: The Goddess of Shanghai:

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Masterly performance by Ruan Ling-yuBy Allan LifeSince this film is relatively little known, I'll focus on "The Goddess," finally available in this archival DVD with an excellent monograph by Richard J. Meyer on its star. This actress, Ruan Ling-yu, has been the subject of a reverential docudrama, directed by Stanley Kwan and starring Maggie Cheung (1992). While excerpts from Ruan's films are included in that movie, the impression may linger than this is one more cinema legend inflated by tragedy. Pilloried by tabloids in Shanghai, Ruan Ling-yu committed suicide in 1935, when she was only 24. Until recently, her surviving

films were inaccessible in the West, and none has received more than elementary restoration. Though they date from our own "talkie" era, these movies are silent, and Ruan's inapt sobriquet, "The Chinese Garbo," may conjure an Asian edition of archaic romance. These impressions vanish, however, in the face of "The Goddess" (1934). In this film alone, Ruan confirms her position as one of the immortals of the screen. "The Goddess" portrays a young streetwalker in Shanghai, devoting her earnings and her love to her son, who in the opening scenes is still an infant. With speaking gestures, Ruan unfolds a psyche that circumstance has cloven, that yearns for integration yet also fears it, as if foreknowing the self-destruction that ensues when this reunion of divided selves is forced upon her. When she absorbs herself in her son, the nameless heroine approaches the rapture of some elusive past: a time of wonder and of dreams. When she recedes from her son - and in flashes of confusion, even when the boy is present, Ruan conveys the anguish of that retreat - she faces a present and a future embodied in her "consort," a hulking parasite addicted to gambling and to a need for this woman more profound than he would dream of conceding. The vivid performance of the actor playing this gigolo reminds us how well Ruan has been supported by her fellow players, especially by the boy cast as her son. Her director is a master of his craft, and the cinematography, reminiscent at times of films by Pabst, Lang, and Chaplin, complements the acting very well. But this is the story of a woman, and that woman has been revealed by Ruan Ling-yu with an immediacy that remains startling. In visible terms, only months before her own suicide, Ruan embraced the credo of the Chinese poet Tu Fu: "If my words aren't startling, death itself is without rest." 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Book and Movie in a nice set By Andy C. This is a terrific set. "Ruan Ling-Yu" is a lovingly produced two-piece, both monograph of the actress and DVD of "The Goddess" in a single slip-case. The DVD picture quality is above average - the film quality is not a distraction from the compelling story. To my eyes there was some restoration during the film transfer to DVD (by Haghefilm Conservation, in Amsterdam) but it doesn't appear to be the detailed frame-by-frame conservation of some Western films. The DVD is coupled with a piano score - a great comforting score, reflecting the emotions of the film. The package was produced at Ball State University (Indiana) and distributed by Hong Kong University Press; the DVD is Allregion, and both PAL and NTSC (two sided). The film appears on the disc with either Chinese or English intertitles. (If you fast-forward the Chinese film, the intertitles magically transform). The disc includes an interesting featurette by the author/producer Richard J. Meyer on the historical context of Shanghai filmmaking. He also includes comment by the composer of the piano roll, Kevin Purrone, and the recording engineer Stan Sollars. Oddly, there's no mention of the video restoration. The book is brisk but scholarly on Ruan's difficult and dramatic life in China of the 1920s and 1930s. It includes 49 photos and is also informed by Meyer's relationship with screenwriter Shen Ji, who shared his years of research and personal on-set conversations with contemporaries of Ruan Ling-Yu. All together, a nice package. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great updated silent movie By Ofdignity Extremely interest silent movie of the 1930's. Shanghai was the fifth largest city, the Japanese was invading the city and women were expressing independence from filial piety during the filming of this movie. Greatly interested me as I studied Asian Women and their suffrage reformation. Ruan Ling-yu impress me as her acting ability was way beyond her time.

Ruan Ling-Yu: The Goddess of Shanghai tells the story of one of the greatest Chinese movie stars of the silent era from humble origins to tragic death at the height of her career. Shanghai between the two world wars was a city of intrigues, political change, corruption, vice, social disparities, and creativity. It was here in the Yangtze River Delta that Chinese movie-making reached its peak. Feeding off the decay of their ancient civilization, and inspired by the frenzy to build a new one, the Shanghai filmmakers captured a crucial transition in Chinese history. Shanghai films of this period established the basic tones, themes, and techniques that would affect the future of the Chinese film industry. In order to appreciate Chinese cinema and its most famous actress, it is essential to understand this rich, formative period when the industry established its standards for creativity and social commentary. The individual whose films best reflected the turbulent times of the period was Ruan Ling-yu. Her life and work symbolized the social currents of Shanghai and the tragedy of China during its long downfall. This book provides context by describing the political and social conditions of life in Shanghai during this period. It covers Ruan's production company Lianhua and her directors as well as touches upon her fellow performers. The conclusion discusses the legacy of one of the most important actresses of the silent screen. The book contains photographs from Ruan's most creative films that demonstrate the visual sophistication of her work. It also includes a complete filmography of all of Ruan's films, a bibliography, a list of film archives that have her films, information about where to obtain film copies and pertinent websites.

About the Author Richard J. Meyer is Distinguished Fulbright Chair in Twentieth-Century History of Communications at L'Universit del Piemonte Orientale Amedeo Avogadro in Italy, Edmund F. and Virginia B. Ball Professor of Telecommunications Emeritus at Ball State University, and Visiting Professor at the Center for Journalism and Media Studies at the University of Hong Kong.