

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Edward Yang: a new day in Taiwan</b>
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Pacific Film Archive</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	3
Subjects	Yang Teh-ch'ang (1947-2007), Min Kuo 36, Shanghai, China (Republic : 1949- )
Film Subjects	Kongbu fenzi (The terrorizer), Yang Teh-ch'ang,, 1986 Qingmei zhuma (Taipei story), Yang Teh-ch'ang,, 1985 Duli shidai (A Confucian confusion), Yang Teh-ch'ang,, 1994 Mahjong, Yang Teh-ch'ang,, 1996 Haitan de yitian (That day, on the beach), Yang Teh-ch'ang,, 1983 Guling jie shaonian sha ren shijian (A brighter summer day), Yang Teh-Chang,, 1991

Pacific Film Archive  
University of California  
Berkeley Art Museum  
2625 Durant Avenue  
Berkeley, California  
Telephone: (510) 642-1412  
General admission:  
\$6 for one film,  
\$7.50 for double bills

## Edward Yang: A New Day in Taiwan

Maverick director and writer Edward Yang has been one of the key figures in Asian filmmaking since the 1980s. With the other contemporary Taiwanese sensation, fellow filmmaker and friend Hou Hsiao-hsien, Yang, more than simply putting modern Taiwanese cinema on the map, has redrawn the map, "redefining modernity in the world as well as in cinema," as critic Jonathan Rosenbaum wrote. Yang's overarching theme, the search for cultural and individual identity in contemporary Taiwan, has taken him through the high modernism of his earlier urban landscapes to the rapid-fire pace and social clutter of his newest, *Mahjong*; from psychologically complex female protagonists to middle-class males running in packs through the boomtown of Taipei. One can almost feel the shift and sway of the glittering high-rises, built as they are on a shaky moral foundation. Yang is known for the dizzying complexity of his plots in which characters and sets of characters cross, interact, and double-cross, all the while remaining seemingly unrelated. With a love/hate relationship with the U.S. (where he was partly educated) as a foil, Yang has gone beyond Godard's "children of Marx and Coca-Cola" to try to define the strange hybrid of his country's youth, and therefore its future. Yang: "The bombs we plant in each other are ticking away."

*Edward Yang: A New Day in Taiwan* is a touring series organized by The Film Center at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago, and curated by Barbara Scharres with the cooperation of Edward Yang. Special thanks to Dr. Li Lang and Roger Garcia.

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### SATURDAY MARCH 7

#### Mahjong 9:15

*Edward Yang (Taiwan, 1996)*

*Mahjong* is Edward Yang's latest blackly comic, almost comic-book portrait of a rapacious Taipei lowlife, merely the higher echelons stripped of pretense. An essentially centerless film centers around Red Fish, de facto leader of a gang of young toughs (with soft centers) who include a gigolo and a canny spiritualist. When Red Fish's father goes into hiding from the underworld figures to whom he owes his soul, the boys are called into action. However, as they are continually distracted by sex, which is the neon calling card of the society they hope to enter, they are little threat to anyone but themselves. Running circles around the boys' world is a British entrepreneur whose elitism betrays the desperate straits of the carpetbagger, and a French woman who, unaccountably, loves him; love among predators in a boomtown. Set at a frantic pitch and pace, challenging us to keep track of its moves, *Mahjong* is cast as a game in which players, not tiles, are discarded one by one and there is no winning hand.

• Written by Yang. Photographed by Li Yixu, Li Longyu. With Virginie Ledoyen, Tang Congsheng, Ke Yuluen, Zhang Zhen. (121 mins, In English and Mandarin with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)



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## FRIDAY MARCH 13

### That Day, on the Beach 7:00

Edward Yang (Taiwan, 1983)

Preceded by short:

**Expectations** (Edward Yang, Taiwan, 1982). (Zhiwang). One of four episodes that make up the omnibus film *In Our Time, Expectations* revealed Yang to be a director of great emotional sensitivity. The film prefigures *A Brighter Summer Day* with its focus on family trauma and growing sexual awareness by its adolescent protagonist. (30 mins, In Mandarin with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

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(*Haitan De Yi Tien*). A film of epic scope, *That Day, on the Beach* had an enormous impact in Taiwan. Its narrative scale, multiple intersecting stories, and self-reflexive mode marked the film as something entirely new for Chinese cinema. A focus on the emotional lives of two women, and their implicit rejection of patriarchal dominance, was considered taboo-breaking. In the framing story, Tan, a concert pianist living abroad, is contacted in Vienna by her old friend Lin (the superb Sylvia Chang), now a successful businesswoman, and the two get together to talk over old times. Seamless flashbacks reveal the histories of both friends.... Identity and values are the underlying themes, shifting in time as experience molds each woman in her journey of self-discovery. Cinematography by Chris Doyle, currently Asia's most renowned director of photography (*Farewell, My Concubine*), gives the film a dreamy beauty.—Barbara Scharres, The Film Center, Chicago

• Written by Yang, Wu Nien-chen. Photographed by Chris Doyle, Chang Hui-kung. With Sylvia Chang, Ho Yin-moon, Shu Ming, Lee Lian. (165 mins, In Mandarin with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

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## SATURDAY MARCH 14

### Taipei Story 7:00

Edward Yang (Taiwan, 1985)

(*Ching-mei Chu-ma*). The collapsing relationship between two urban professionals forms the basis of Yang's breakthrough feature. Friends since childhood, now lovers, businesswoman Shu-chen (pop star Tsai Chin) and ex-baseball player Lon (acclaimed director Hou Hsiao-hsien in a rare acting appearance) wander through a thriving, neon-lit boomtown. Instead of the joy of success, they discover only the fear of failure. Stylistically, Yang remains enamored of the still tableaux of Antonioni, Dreyer, and Ozu; an imposingly static frame accents the characters' inherent stasis. The camera focuses on spinning fans, slightly twisting leaves, and other images of imprisoned repetition, while the soundtrack pointedly drowns words and speeches into the anonymous urban din. Unable to command the full attention of either sight or sound, the characters' actions shrink, revealing only softly shaded moods of failure, loneliness, and sadness. Though set in mid-eighties Taipei, the film's reflective atmosphere and absorbing, haunting visions of ordinary life are relevant anywhere, and any time.—Jason Sanders

• Written by Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Chu Tien-wen. Photographed by Yang Wei-han. With Tsai Chin, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Wu Nien-chen, Lin Hsiu-ling. (115 mins, In Mandarin with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

### The Terrorizer 9:10

Edward Yang (Taiwan, 1986)

(*K'ung-pu fen-tzu*). Ostensibly inspired by a documentary on a German terrorist group, Yang's third feature instead discovers, hidden within the stillness of human emotion, a terror far more brutal than any moment of physical violence. Bookended within images of guns and corpses, the film's true focus is on the violence enacted in everyday relationships, whether between lovers, coworkers, or strangers. The narrative weaves intricately between three scattered groups of characters: a doctor and his novelist wife, a mopey woman hoodlum, and a love-struck photographer, all threaded together by one prank phone call and a sense of



deceit and lingering entropy. For Yang, the film “is built rather like a puzzle; the spectator can rearrange it in his head when he gets home”; it is the inescapable feeling, not the telling, of the story that matters. Indeed, the gunshots at the beginning and end seem interchangeable, almost anticlimactic, rendered quaintly obsolete by the film’s painstakingly traumatic layering of human relations and their emotional violence.—Jason Sanders

• Written by Yang, Hsiao Yeh. Photographed by Chang Chan. With Cora Miao, Li Li-chun, Chin Shih-chieh, Wang An. (105 mins, In Mandarin with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

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## SATURDAY MARCH 21

### A Brighter Summer Day 7:00

*Edward Yang (Taiwan, 1991)*

(Guling Jie Shaonian Sha Ren Shijian). A Brighter Summer Day is a picture of Taiwan at the start of the sixties as reflected in the story of a fourteen-year-boy who kills his girlfriend. This is a Taiwan caught between the pull of Mainland China and the lure of the U.S., land of milk and honey where Elvis Presley sings (or does he?) of “a brighter summer day.” It’s also a Taiwan of Communist-spy scares, and a Taiwan where the kids from Mainland families have formed street gangs to assert their own identity and to challenge each other for supremacy. Xiao Si’s best friends are members of the Little Park Gang [whose] charismatic founder Honey has gone into hiding. When Xiao Si meets Ming he keeps his distance; he knows that she was Honey’s girlfriend. But a friendship develops between them...that eventually pulls Xiao Si to pieces. Edward Yang locates this story at the heart of a vast fresco crowded with warmth, humor, violence, and a wealth of intimate detail.—Tony Rayns, Vancouver Film Festival

• Written by Yang, Yan Hongya, Yang Shunqing, Lai Mingtang. Photographed by Zhang Huigong, Li Longyu. With Zhang Zhen, Lisa Yang, Zhang Guozhu, Elaine Jin. (240 mins, In Mandarin with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

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## SATURDAY MARCH 28

### A Confucian Confusion 7:00

*Edward Yang (Taiwan, 1994)*

(Du Li Shi Dai). With wicked humor and great insight, Yang chronicles what Orville Schell called the “unprecedented meltdown of 4,000 years of Confucian culture” amidst the Taiwanese economic miracle. “Few Chinese filmmakers have probed the heart of this contemporary darkness with such relentlessness,” Schell wrote. Yang runs with the ironic idea that the rigid conformism and discipline of Confucianism has produced personal wealth that confounds the very precepts of Confucius. The anxiety of this philosophical dislocation permeates life with a certain hysteria, at least as Yang depicts it in following two days for a group of Taipei yuppies. This upwardly mobile clique revolves around Molly, who runs her family’s public relations business. Molly, the Seinfeld of Taipei, draws on the loyalty of old friends to prop up both her commercial and emotional life amid the sparkling skyscrapers of the new Taiwan. Her cronies, with their deliciously interconnected histories, include artistic sellouts and would-be existentialists, perpetual failures in love, and searchers for a neo-Confucian identity—one that doesn’t preclude the big bucks.

• Written by Yang. Photographed by Arthur Wong, et al. With Ni Shujun, Chen Xiangqi, Wang Yeming, Wang Zhongzheng. (125 mins, In Mandarin with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)