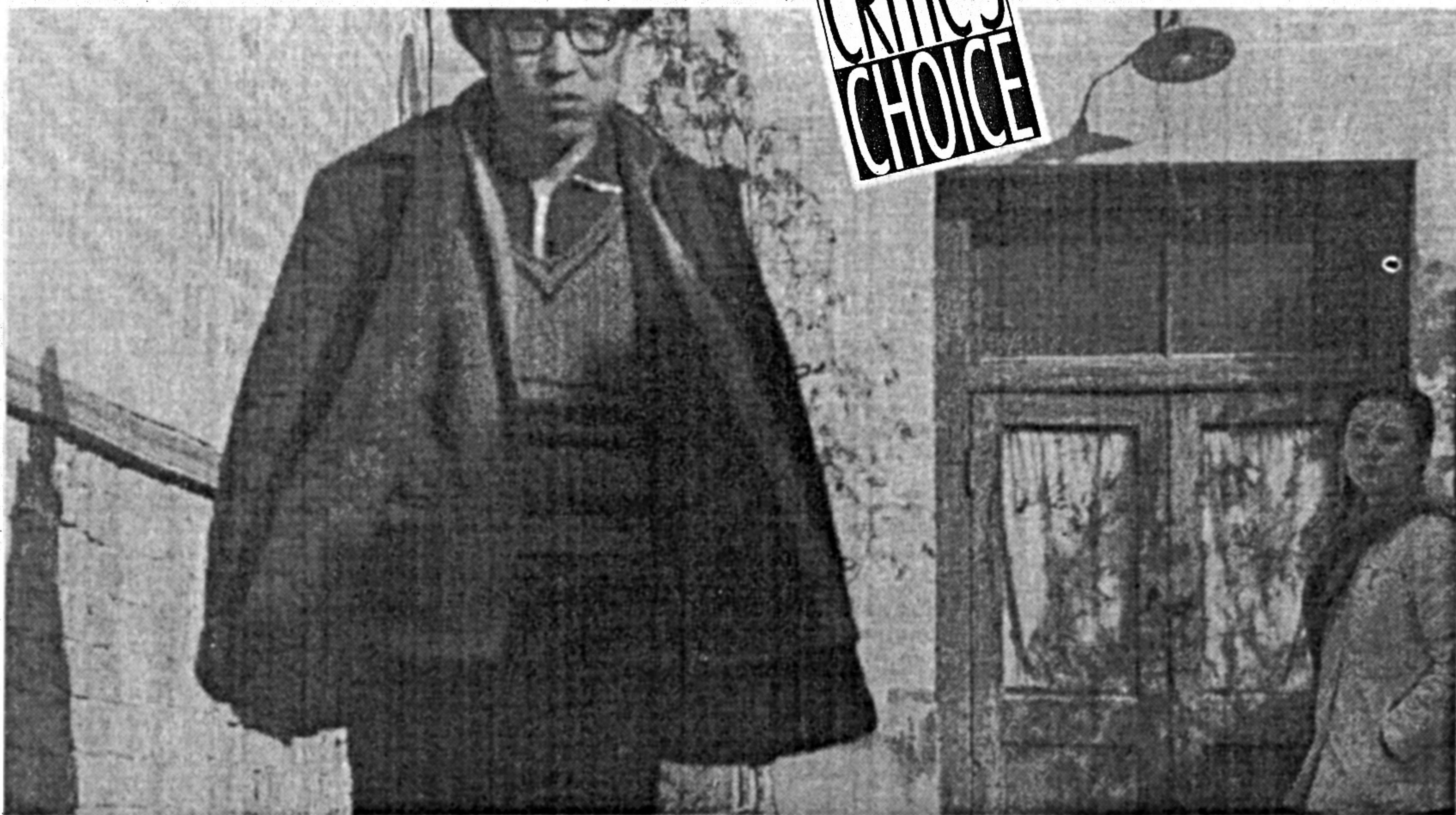


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CRITIC'S
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Platform

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This second feature by Jia Zhang-ke (*Pickpocket*), which made the rounds of a few festivals in 2000 and has been very hard to see ever since (this is its first Chicago screening), is one of the most impressive Chinese films I've ever seen. Its theme is the great theme of Chinese cinema, the discovery of history, which links such otherwise disparate masterpieces as *The Blue Kite*, *Blush*, *Actress*, *The Puppet Master*, and *A Brighter Summer Day*. *Platform* is as ambitious as any of these predecessors, and its style is no less magisterial. The story charts the course of the Cultural Revolution for about a decade, starting in 1979, and the shifts in values and lifestyles, culture and economy as China moves inexorably from Maoism to capitalism and acquires glitzy Western accou-

trements—all as witnessed by five actors in a small provincial theater troupe. As I remember, each episode unfolds in a single long take, with a beautifully choreographed mise en scene that recalls the fluid Hungarian pageants of Miklos Jancso in the 60s and 70s, though the political implications here are at times more sinister: one memorable sequence is punctuated by off-screen gunshots as prisoners are being executed. Originally 192 minutes long, the film was recut by its writer-director to its current 155 minutes. Essential viewing. In Mandarin with subtitles. Northwestern Univ. Block Museum of Art, 1967 South Campus Dr., Evanston, Sunday, May 19, 6:00, 847-491-4000.

—Jonathan Rosenbaum