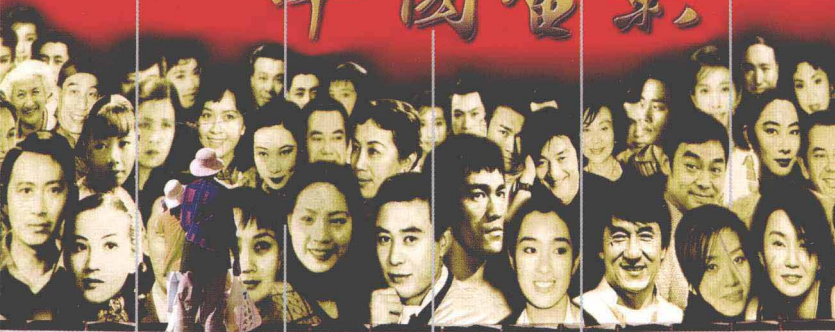


中國電影



Chinese Cinema

1949-2009

Directors, Stars & Producers

■ Tang Yuankai



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

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业学院图书馆 Directors, Stars & Producers

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Introduction

Early in 2009, Han Sanping was awarded China Central Television's award for Economic Personality of the Year 2008. He was the first film maker ever to win such a prize.

The key to his win is simple enough: box-office success. A former director, Han Sanping is Board Chairman of China Film Group, the largest state-owned film production enterprise. Films produced by his team won half of the total market in 2008. He was involved in all of the eight films grossing over a billion yuan in 2008.

China's total box-office revenue in 2008 (excluding rural market) reported a record-breaking 4.34 billion yuan, an increase of 30.5 percent over 2007, and thus appeared for the first time in the global top 10 rankings. More than 60 percent of that came from domestically



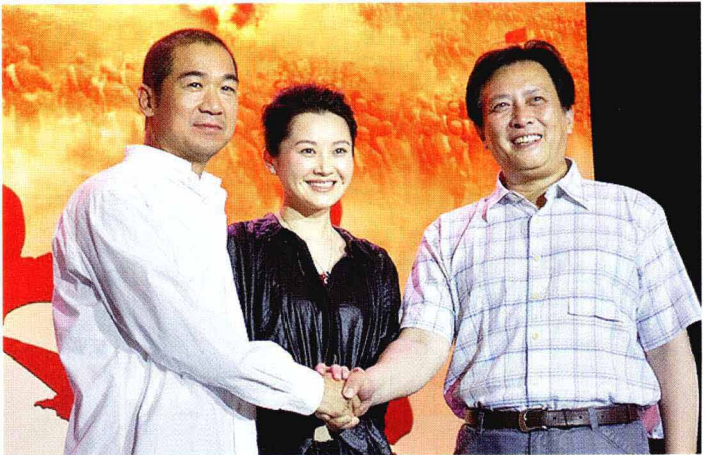
■ Han Sanping (right), Chairman of China Film Group, announcing the publicity website for *The Founding of a Republic* in the run-up to its release

produced movies, beating imported productions for the sixth year running. The gross profits of the film industry rose from less than two billion yuan in 2002 to eight billion yuan in 2008. In a year of global economic downturn beset with

calamities such as blizzards and earthquakes, China's film industry success was like striking oil – a rare bright spot on the economic landscape.

As little as five years ago, such success was unimaginable. Chinese cinema, born a century ago, was once “close to people's hearts,” but it had been out of favor for a time too.

- Leading actors (and their roles) in *The Founding of a Republic*. L to R: Zhang Guoli (Chiang Kai-shek), Xu Qing (Soong Ching-ling), and Tang Guoqiang (Mao Zedong)



For the new year of 2009, Han Sanping intended to make film even more popular with the public: apart from pursuing greater box-office receipts, he was gearing up to start filming *The Founding of a Republic*, a movie to mark the 60th birthday of the People's Republic of China. He reverted to his old role of film director and invited an army of stars and directors to join in. His goal was clear: critical acclaim and box-office success.

Han Sanping started out in the film industry in 1977. Statistics for 1979 show an audience of 29.3 billion person-times, an all-time high and never subsequently equaled. It meant that there were 70 million cinema visits a day. But the Golden Days were soon history: audience numbers kept on falling, and by 1994 they had slipped to less than a third of what they had been at the peak. It was in that year that Han was appointed chief executive of Beijing Film Studio. It was one of China's



■ Busts of Chinese cinema pioneers: Zheng Zhengqi, Li Minwei, and Xia Yan exhibited at China National Film Museum

top film makers, but a major headache for its new boss was how to pay the people working for it.

China Film Group was set up in May 1999, an organization consolidating eight former film units including China Film Company and Beijing Film Studio. Han Sanping was appointed Vice Chair of the

Board of Directors and Deputy General Manager. At the time, Han and his industry colleagues were facing a life-or-death situation, the market squeezed on one side by Hollywood and DVDs on the other, and no less often under attack from television and other rivals.

“Our national film industry has reached crisis point. Unless Chinese cinema rises quickly, it will be stifled by foreign imports, just like what has happened in many other parts of the world.” This is what the new appointee Han kept repeating, to other people and to himself. At the same time, deepening structural reform manifested the determination of government organs in charge of film production to develop a market-oriented film industry.

Ten years later, Han has weathered the storm and is going forward with ever more confidence.

I. Starting with *Bridge*

● A New Bridge

In September 2008, Dalian hosted the 17th Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival, China's largest film festival. Chen Qiang, by then in his nineties, was presented with a Lifelong Achievement Award. Chen played a role in *Bridge*, a movie acclaimed as the first feature film of the People's Republic. Its title had symbolic resonance, a bridge leading China toward a brave new world.

When *Bridge* was being shot, China was still at war. It took over a year to



■ Chen Peisi, son of the veteran actor Chen Qiang, receiving the Lifelong Achievement Award on behalf of his father at the Golden Rooster Film Festival, September 2008

produce the film about workers making urgent repairs to rail track to support the liberation struggle in the late 1940s. They used “recycled” film stock, i.e. used films processed to remove the original images and covered with new emulsion.

Before shooting started, the director Wang Bin asked each actor or actress to find his or her own model in life. They stayed with the workers so as to learn their way of life and work. Each night they would report what they had seen and learned that day. “Only when we have a thorough understanding of life,” they said, “can our acting be lifelike and convincing.” “Plunging into life” and learning from life as soon as a crew is set up has long been an important tradition, or rather, a rule, in China’s film industry.

Early in 1950, Wang Bin built another “bridge” – he made a cinematic version of the folk opera *White-haired Girl* which he had helped create. The movie won China



■ L to R: Wang Bin, director of *Bridge*; Tian Hua, heroine of *White-haired Girl*; Yu Yang, hero of *Bridge*

its first ever international film award. He said to Tian Hua, the actress who played the suffering peasant heroine, “You were born and bred in a village, but you still can learn something from the lives of peasants.”

Ever since *Bridge*, the vigor, vitality, revolutionary fervor and creative hunger of the People's Republic have never been absent from the silver screen. Over the 17 years from 1949 to 1966, the year that the "cultural revolution" (1966-1976) erupted, the special features of Chinese cinema were being formed. Using simple images, it portrayed China's experience and imagining of revolution and reconstruction. The development of Chinese cinema and implementing of socialism were closely interwoven. For all the political campaigns, ideological conflicts and struggles of those years, China's film makers gave the public a number of classics, works of cultural and artistic value that were worthy of their times.

The 1950s and 1960s were decades of radical change in cinema esthetics in the world at large; but this had no bearing on Chinese film-making. For one thing, there was effectively no exchange