

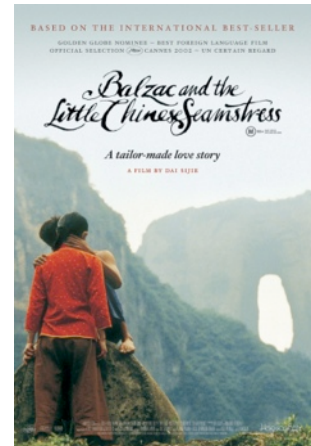
Love and passion in the land of Confucius and Mao

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It's now the start of another Chinese New Year. The week-long holiday began yesterday, and for China's 1.3 billion people (and 63 million more overseas), it means travel, family reunions, gift-giving, feasting and lots of lucky red everywhere. Since it also coincides with Valentine's Day, let's take a look at some Chinese films that involve the theme of passionate love.

Shadow Magic (*China/Germany/Taiwan/U.S., 2000*) The first-ever China-Taiwan co-production, this is a charming movie, especially for cinephiles. Set in 1902 Peking, it's the story of a British entrepreneur who sets up China's first cinema, screening silent shorts for the amazed locals. He's helped by a young portrait photographer who has a secret passion: the higher-born daughter of Lord Tan, star of the Peking Opera. The Columbia TriStar DVD has a director's commentary.

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress (*France/China, 2002*) Dai Sijie directed this adaptation from his semi-autobiographical bestseller about being sent to a mountain village for "re-education" during the Cultural Revolution and falling in love with a girl by secretly reading passages from forbidden novels by Balzac, Dumas and Flaubert. Better than Sijie's 2006 follow-up, *The Chinese Botanist's Daughters* (a France-Canada co-production). A Seville DVD.



Springtime in a Small Town (*China/Hong Kong/France/Netherlands, 2002*) This careful re-make of the 1948 love-triangle classic *Spring in a Small Town* marked director Tian Zhuangzhuang's return to filmmaking after a decade of being blacklisted for **The Blue Kite**, his acclaimed 1993 portrayal of Maoist-era brutality (it's also available on DVD, from Kino Video). The Palm Pictures DVD includes an interview with the director and a short making-of.

Purple Butterfly (*China/France, 2003*) Shot neo-realist style, this thriller is about a resistance group called Purple Butterfly in Japanese-occupied Shanghai in the 1930s. Plotting to murder the chief of the Japanese secret service, the group runs into complications of mistaken identity and forbidden love that pits a lovely assassin (Zhang Ziyi) against an old flame who now runs with the enemy. The Seville DVD is bare-bones.

2046 (*China/France/Germany/Hong Kong, 2004*) Described by director Wong Kar Wai as a variation on – not a sequel to – his 2000 hit **In the Mood for Love**, this lyrical film picks up on the life and loves of the lead character, a writer (Tony Lueng) in 1960s Hong Kong and Singapore who has written a science fiction novel called 2046. The Seville DVD in Quebec is dubbed and subtitled in French only; for English, get the Sony Pictures version.

And coming soon: On Feb. 26, Criterion releases a four-disc set of **The Last Emperor**, Bernardo Bertolucci's 1987 epic about early-20th-century child emperor Pu Yi. And on March 11, Palm Pictures has **Summer Palace**, the steamy 2006 Chinese-French co-production about love, sex and youth politics set amid the turmoil of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989; the first Chinese movie with full-frontal nudity, it's banned back home.

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