

A Supremely Necessary Manual

THAT a book can be christened simply Briksha or Brikkho was quite a departure. The book itself was a regular surprise — even judging by its exterior. A huge thing containing 500 pages of text in white print and set in an unusual 1/8 double demy format it is as ponderous a thing as it is, thanks to Ashoke Karmakar (cover designer) pleasing to the eye.

What appears to be a subtitle on the cover is but what completes the name: Tree: A Planting and Nurturing Manual. Frankly, never in my life was I prepared to see a) a manual on this subject, b) that too in Bengali, very refreshing in its simplicity and assuring in its definitiveness and c) produced so lavishly as to not only help regular use but also to preserve it as a collector's item. The price of the first edition — I am sure it will go into many many editions — is a prohibitive 500 Taka and I felt very few would grudge parting with that sum for such a useful thing which can as well serve as a keepsake or a gift — at least this was my feeling. But the people needing this manual most may not all have the means to go for such an expenditure. I have, however, been told on authority that the price would come down drastically in the later editions — after all the whole of the production expenses of this volume has been borne by the Secandianvian good Samaritan NORAD.

The text, particularly the general discussion on the importance of the subject matter including a detailed low-down the utility of trees, has been written with knowledge and rare comprehension. A manual can only be a manual. Neither too good nor too bad. It is in the frills that Briksha has rather generously decked itself with something which shoos the value of this volume beyond a run-of-the-mill manual. A sampling can be taken of this: Certain important aspects of tree culture in Bangladesh; some practical experiences related to tree plantation and nurturing in Bangladesh which should prove very rich in information giving out all that one knows about growing a regular garden from bank loans to the governmental facilities addressed to that job. Even better, there are 70-odd pages of appendices that include such gems as quotes from the Koran and Hadith extolling the trees, two episodes from the Holy Prophet's life illustrating his love of trees, some 66 slogans fit to be made into posters and billboards, sayings of Khawna on trees which are but parts of our ancient wisdom in the matter, quotes from our major poets on trees and flowers, our many prejudices and legends surrounding the trees, catalogues of non-herbal and herbal uses of various trees (a storehouse of very necessary knowledge), so on and so forth.

The best part of the book is its lavish production — almost flawless from the printing and design point of view. And the worst part? There are too many bloomers, regular wholers in the section it shouldn't have specially been. — a summary introduction to selected trees (illustrated both by line drawing and colour photographs and pushing the production cost beyond easy reach). Just before this section is a very useful page of information as to which trees were to be grown where. In this wonderful directory we come across the tree Akashmoni which has been elsewhere in the book described to be of Australian origin and as being introduced in Bangladesh in the sixties. The tree is mentioned in the book at least 18 times, a very close second to mahogany which occurs 19 to 20 times. This is understandable as tree people — foresters, gardeners, PWD men etc. etc. — have all found in this fast growing Acacia species a very easy way to please superiors bent on greening cities overnight. This has made a farce of tree plantation — at

BOOK REVIEW

Briksha Ropan O Paricharja Manual (A manual on tree planting and care)

Edited by Dr Kamal Siddiqui and Syed Salamat Ali

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least as farcical as the barracks people's sudden infatuation for Musenda and the Bottle-brush in the seventies. Now who invented and gave this Bengali name to Acacia Auricolliformis? The christening must have been done not earlier than the sixties. That is why it should be eminently traceable, where did the researchers of the book get the name from. There is, however, another name of this tree, given by Rabinranath himself — Shonajhuri — some eighty years back. He had some right in the matter. It was at his behest the plant was imported to protect the eroding soil of the Santiniketan Khowal. And it is by that name it has been known over all these decades wherever under this tree was grown in undivided Bengal. There was a big surge of tree planting in the initial three years of our national independence — the Bangabandhu years that is — and this tree was used as a very obliging recourse to green parks and avenues. The rather newly established Jahangirnagar University has a wonderful avenue of this — prompted of course by the same consideration of very fast growth. And it was always and everywhere called by the literati as the Shonajhuri.

Are the editors and compilers satisfied that Peto forum is Radhachura? The authoritative books rather call it yellow gold mohur and in the absence of a Bengali name, Dwijen Sharma has christened it Kanachchura — the goldcapped. And what, pray, is the plant chompaphul — which does not occur in any previous book on the subject. In the prescription for roadside trees there are two among 15 species, called chompa and chompaphul. Very interesting! How do they differ and which is who. Dr Nawajish Ahmed has run madly after this champaca will-o-the-wisp and has at the end been satisfied with his findings about the true identities of Kanak-champa, Swarna-champa and Muchkunda. The much familiar Kanthal-champa is only a shrub and not a tree to qualify as being a member this group. Dr Ahmed perhaps doesn't know a tree by the name of chompaphul, let alone knowing another plant barely as the chompa.

Full one hundred and eighty pages have been devoted to the section which with a little more care could easily be the richest section not only of this book but among all kindred publications of this size. The first defect that detracts it from that glory is the photographs. They have been taken of the trees in a way that do not show them in the best light. The foliage and the branching pattern are almost always smudgy, tuzzy. The special stamps that each tree bears — those that set one apart from all others — do not all come out in any of the photos of the trees, owing very obviously to the photographer's not being a specialist in arboricultural photography. Close-up studies of leaves come out well but quite unnecessarily for all the leaves of all the selected trees are given, just below the photos, in rather efficiently done line drawings. These duplications have been quite absurd — there should have been a photo of a shonajhuri tree with its hanging yellow garlandish flowers (Akashmoni) instead of the leaves and a suggestion of flowers which appear in line-drawing only centimeters below. This applies to so many cases, appallingly.

boasts of more than 40 karst patterns, including every major pattern found in other caves around the world.

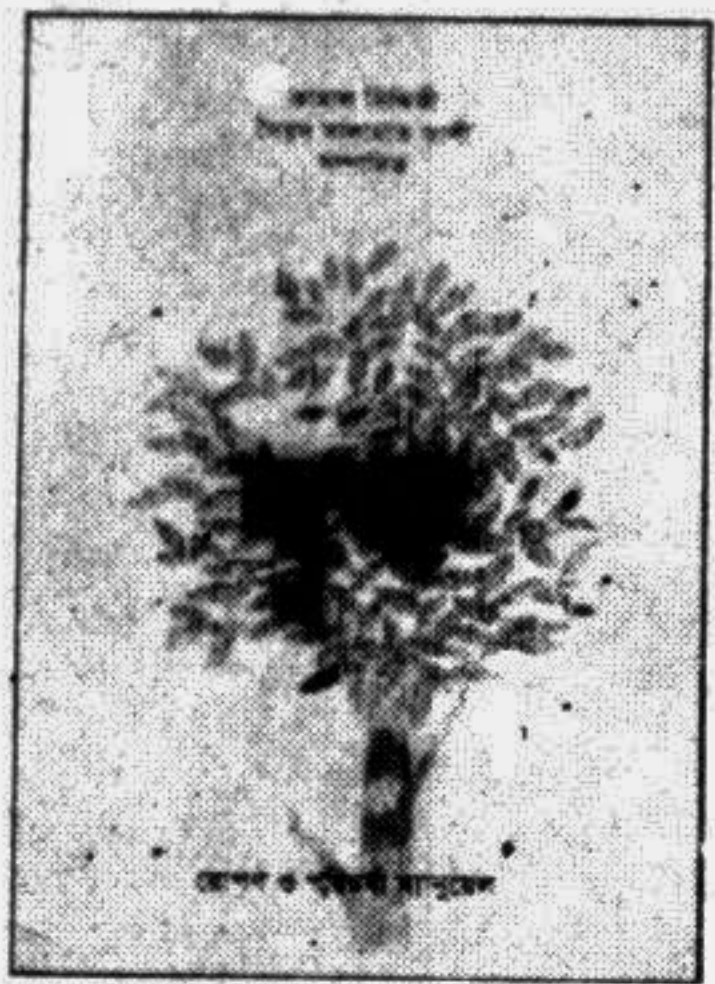
About 73 per cent of its territory is covered by karst formations.

The beautiful and unique subterranean landscape of Zhijin was traditionally believed to have resulted from limestone deposits. When water rich in calcium carbonate drips for age after age from the cave roof, the deposits are said to form stalagmites or stalactites.

But the traditional theory cannot fully explain the uniquely-shaped outcroppings in the cave such as a 'silver tree' or the tubular spiral shapes.

It was Mr Ag and his team who found a logical explanation. From the materials they collected, they found that the breathtaking beauty of the outgrowths in the caves is due mainly to the constant activity of the humble algae.

— Depthneus Asia



There must have been some misunderstanding about Keora — the provincial name for the universally loved fragrant flower tree Keya or Ketak'. In both Hindi and Urdu they call the very Keya as Keora. This book designates a 90 to 100 feet tall coastal area tree as Keora. May be, may be. There are stranger things etc etc. Then, oh no, there is rather a recognisable photo (rare in this book) of a date-palm tree followed by a line-drawing of the same, but very very badly done. Alongside are drawing of dates, resembling more sizeable jackfruits than anything else...O dear, is that a photo of the lovely Khoiya Babla? No.

only two tender shoots off from its branches. What happened to the beautiful tree? Perhaps the most tragic mistake about these illustrations is the photo of the Shonajhuri — which doesn't have even a speck of its glorious yellow. One problem that seems to have constantly plagued the editors and writers of this immensely valuable book is their less than ideal acquaintance with the literary and standard nomenclature of plants. Chhatim is the universal derivation from the Sanskrit Saptaparni — and chhatian is a corruption of that used in certain — and by no means all — parts of eastern Bengal, now Bangladesh. Why should this book use chhatian in preference to chhatim. There is a caption somewhere — mooli bansher pushpa man-jurt. Now what is a man-jurt? The only meaning of it is a monetary grant.

I very much want to repeat that this has been a most outstanding publication — outstandingly useful and eminently unparsing in giving whatever there was to give — and that it would be collected, preserved and, best of all, used by all lovers of trees in the land. And it arrived just when this was most needed. Bangladesh is at present awfully placed — tree-wise. The green cover has shrunk from a happy 25 per cent 50 years ago to a harrowing less than six per cent or may be even less. This has to be reversed by both collective and individual, commercial, social, political and cultural endeavour. Otherwise, we are lost. We are so thankful to the editors and publishers — the National Institute of Local Government — for turning in such an urgently needed manual.

Reviewed by Waheedul Haque

THE weekly drama telecast Thursday night by BTW was based on the topic of the day, the conflict between the fundamentalists and the liberals. The landlord and mostly the male heads of the village portrayed in the drama titled 'Kalo Jyotsna' were supposed to be symbolising fundamentalists and the school teachers and NGO employees, liberals. The conflict point, in the opinion of the former, was that the liberals were employing their wives in their organizations, and that action had eroded the morality guidelines which meant women would no longer remain under purdah, mix freely with their male counterparts and would not do the daily household chores which has been traditionally the system of the family. Their another complaint was that the respect the village elders were commanding in their area was no longer existing as unemployed labourers were also employed and no longer working in the land holders' farms, so the cost of labour had increased affecting them. On the other hand, the liberals' view was that the NGOs in the village were providing jobs to the unemployed especially the females who were then providing some extra income to their families.

The tension between the two groups increased and it seemed that the group symbolised to the viewers as fundamentalists would emerge winners and impart influence over the liberals, but the liberals then thought enough was enough and they began to resist and it is then the drama concludes offering no solution keeping the viewers guessing about the outcome of the conflict.

The episode of BTW serial Tathapi telecast on Tuesday was repeated Friday morning as a countrywide power cut had deprived millions of viewers from watching it. This

Tele-View

by Kaiser Parvez Ali

episode had many court scenes with Kanak (Dolly Zohur) in the dock facing the questions and counter questions of the lawyers. As expected, Kanak's colleague gives statement in the court about the replacement of the suitcase at a foreign airport. After deliberations in the court the accused in the smuggling case is found not guilty. Rehan Sobhan's son is shown apologizing to Kanak for suspecting her to be a gold smuggler. Rehan Sobhan (Aly Zaker) once again detects gold on person of a handicapped smuggler which is quite amazing. The artificial leg of the smuggler was made of pure gold and also both his crutches had small pieces of gold concealed in them. The drama seemed to be heading towards a happy ending with solution of the problems, when gold smugglers agitated because the latest consignment of gold being brought in the country in a unique manner was detected. They decide to take revenge by kidnapping Rehan's only grown up son Shovon. In the next episode we may see how Rehan deals with the problem.

The Friday afternoon movie of the week telecast by BTW was the Oscar winning film 'Out of Africa' starring Meril Streep and Robert Redford. The story of the film is that Meril with her husband goes to Kenya on coffee plantation business. They get busy with their work and as time passes her husband gets interested in hunting and often goes on hunting trips.

Soon the first world war breaks out and Meril's husband goes to the border to take part in military action. Meanwhile, Meril meets Redford and they become good friends. Her husband visits her and again goes back to war. One day Meril finds herself sick and on con-

sultations with the doctor discovers she has syphilis which was at the time not curable. She goes back to her native Denmark for a short visit and comes back and separates herself from her husband because she thinks her husband is to be blamed for her condition. The film is being shown in two parts, the concluded first part was slow and did not possess anything special to justify the Oscar awards, but there could be still more to come which we wait to see in the next and final part.

BTW, of course with the courtesy of the sponsors, had the football bumper bonus for its viewers — live telecast of the opening ceremony and matches of World Cup Football from the United States. However, the timing is making viewers nocturnal owls which will take little time to adjust after the conclusion of the games but then BTW cannot be blamed for this. They have made arrangements even shifting the news timing and scheduled programmes so that there is no complaint from the sport lovers who want to see the tournament which is staged after every four years.

'Ghare Bahire' magazine programme shown on Monday at 9 pm had informative topics such as the one on environment which was a bit lengthy and would have been better if it was shown as a separate programme.

There were also few minute scenes where actors portrayed behaviour which must not be there in the real life such as the housewife going to bed without switching off the gas cooker. Here the wastage of natural gas was emphasized. In

another scene a man is shown peeling a banana skin and throwing it on the yard while bidding goodbye to his family. As he goes down the yard he steps on the very skin and his foot slips and he falls down. Then three visually handicapped university students were shown who were performing extraordinary activities besides their studies and their blindness was in no way creating obstacles in their path.

On the occasion of Holy Aushura, the tenth day of Moharram, an Iranian feature film called 'Safir' in Persian and dubbed as 'Dooth' in Bengali was telecast Tuesday evening. This film was based on the life of the emissary of Imam Hussain (RA). Ghais Ibne Musawwar, who was entrusted to spread the message of arrival of Imam Hussain to Kufeh. On the way to Kufeh and in Kufeh itself he suffers numerous inhuman tortures but Ghais does not and urges the inhabitants to rise against and resist the dictators and oppressors.

The film was revealing and also entertaining. This type of resistance was followed during the uprising against the Shah of Iran in the late seventies where tools of modern technology were also used. Those were the cassettes and tape recorders secretly and successfully used in the mosques and other public places to motivate the public to topple the Iranian monarchy by the Islamic revolutionaries.

On Tuesday night another documentary film was telecast called 'The Muslim Architecture in Bangladesh'. Many old sixteen century mosques were shown abandoned and dilapidated. They require immediate attention, renovation and restoration, otherwise very soon they may even crumble down.



Winner at the Cannes Film Festival 1993: 'Farewell My Concubine' from China.

The Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci has also adapted an Asian theme in his epic film 'Little Buddha'.

Awards and Acclaim for Films from Asia

by Joachim Kurten

Asian cinema comes to Europe and profits both from Europe's saturation with US films and the crisis in the European film industry, while more and more western directors are finding their themes in the East.

NOT even the film critics or the most inveterate film fans would have anticipated a few years ago that the German cinema-going public would be waiting with baited breath for the latest film by a Chinese director called Chen Kaige, that at the beginning of the 90s the filmmaker Zhang Yi-Mou, also from China, would be coitined among the great stylists in the international film world, or that his female star Gong Li would be mentioned in the same breath with actresses like Meryl Streep or Isabelle Adjani. Today, in cinemas from Hamburg to Munich it is films from Asia — in particular from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan — which are among the most interesting and exciting to be seen. If a work by a renowned Asian film-director is competing in one of the large festivals you can almost bet that it will end up receiving an award.

It has actually been possible over the past decades to see films from Asia in Germany, but mainly in retrospectives or work reviews during film festivals or some large-scale cultural event. Thus the classics of the Indian and Japanese cinema were known, and

German television stations also made sure that films from 'exotic' nations such as the Philippines or Indonesia did not represent a blank spot on the cinema map. But on the everyday cinema landscape, films from Asia were just about as seldom as films from Latin America or Africa.

Since the beginning of the 90s, however, Asian cinema has been much in the news in Germany — and not only because of an artistic renaissance in the two traditional film nations, Japan and India. Any search for the onset of this surprising development leads inevitably to the Chinese film 'The Red Cornfield' (Hong Gouliang) directed by Zhang Yi-Mou, which in 1988 caused a sensation by winning the main prize, the 'Golden Bear', at the Berlin Film Festival. German film critics, and later the cinema public, were very impressed by the film's visual brilliance, its highly polished composition, and its passionately and emotionally narrated plot. People became curious about the director Zhang Yi-Mou. Interest was awakened in Chinese cinema.

This was followed by the realisation that this enormous

Eastern empire had more to offer than propaganda films glorifying the workers, or Mao. Above all, people were astonished by the mastery craftsmanship of these films, which narrated their stories with all the means at the disposal of modern cinema and were at the same time both entertaining and full of nuances — even for western eyes. Suddenly in German film circles people were talking about the 'fifth generation' of Chinese cinema. Other film-makers belonging to this generation were discovered and presented in so-called programme cinemas. Chen Kaige soon qualified in Germany as the most interesting Chinese film-director alongside Zhang Yi-Mou. His films 'King of the Children' (Halzi Wang) and 'Life on a String' (Bian Zou Bian Chang) were shown in German cinemas, as were the latest films by Zhang Yi-Mou 'Judou', 'Raise the Red Lantern' (Dahong Denglong Gaogao Gual), and 'The Story of Qiuju'.

For the time being, the reception given to Chen Kaige's new epic film 'Farewell My Concubine' (Bawang Bei) represents the climax of this suc-

cess story. Over the early months the leading German newspapers had been outdoing one another in their hymns of praise to the winner of the 1993 Cannes Film Festival. The 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung' rated 'Farewell My Concubine' as the most outstanding film of 1993. The 'Spiegel' saw in Kaige's film 'the most passionate, multifaceted and opulent work of the new Chinese cinema'. The film had been running to packed houses in Germany for weeks — although in China itself it may only be shown with several obligatory cuts.

But in the meantime it is not only Chinese films which are causing such a stir in German cinemas. Sensitised by the successes of Kaige and Yi-Mou, many cinema-goers are now more open and attentive in their reactions to films from the Far East. Thus the Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien, 'A City of Sadness' (Beiqing Chengsi), is now regarded as a classical exponent of epic cinema and his films are all sure of a showing in German programme cinemas.

And finally, scarcely known film nations such as South Korea and Vietnam have recently been commanding attention with some remarkable films. Thus 'Aroma of Green Papayas', a film made in France by the Vietnamese director Tran Anh Hung and winner of the award for the best 1993 debut film in Cannes, is having

a successful run in German cinemas at the moment. And since his film 'Surrogate Mother' (Sibaji), the South Korean director Im Kwon-Taek is being rated as one of the most promising talents to have come from Asia.

Affinity through History and Tradition

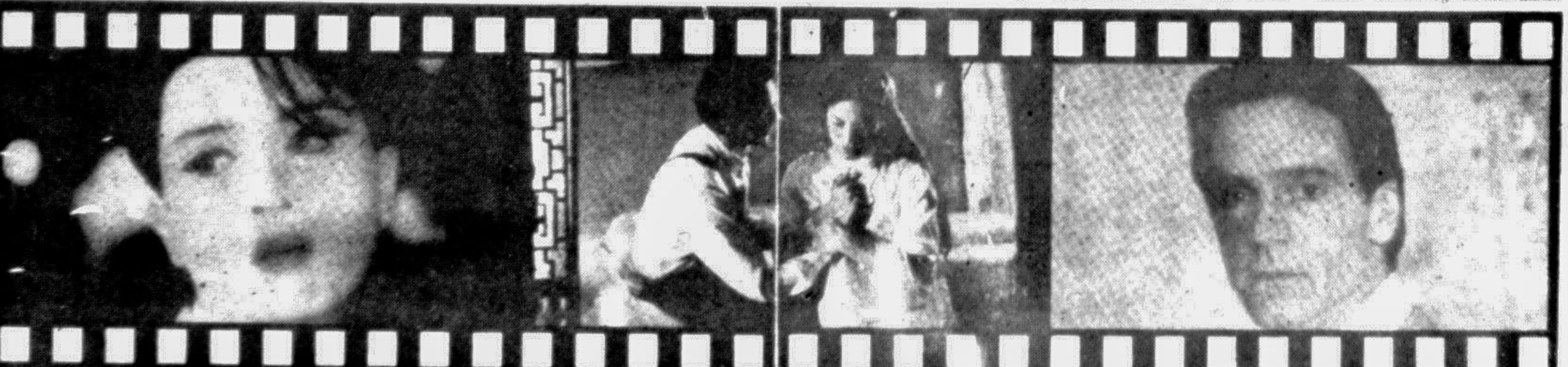
This trend is slanked by films which were directed by Western Europeans and North Americans but which deal with the continent of Asia, reflecting on European-Asian relations, reviewing the centuries-old history of that continent, or recalling relatively recent events such as the Vietnam War. Thus the Berlin Film Festival 1994 opened with Bernardo Bertolucci's Buddhist epic 'Little Buddha', the same director having already enjoyed international success with his China film 'The Last Emperor'. 'M. Butterfly' by the Canadian director David Cronenberg, tells the moving and authentic story of the French diplomat Rene Gallimard who in Peking in the 60s had a fateful affair with a singer from the Peking Opera. Oliver Stone's latest film 'Heaven and Earth' is based on the diaries of a young Vietnamese woman.

What are the reasons for this boom in Asian films? For some years now the European cinema has been going through an artistic and economic crisis. The German cinema market is becoming more and more

dominated by Hollywood productions. As the once traditional alternative to the American film — the European authors' film — declines, these Asian films represent a welcome alternative for a more demanding public, especially as their stories are full of history and tradition and thus often closer to the European concept of art and cinema than the fast-moving entertainment products that are 'made in the USA'.

Curious about the East

In addition, for western viewers these films have a certain exotic attraction, a wealth of colour and light, make-up, gestures, and music: films such as 'Farewell My Concubine' which tells so much about China, its people, its culture, its art and its politics, are sumptuous cinema viewing, entertainment in the best sense of the term. If they also include elements of such little known — in Europe that is — artistic traditions as the Peking Opera, as in 'Farewell My Concubine' then they can fascinate European audiences by their exotic and bizarre strangeness alone. One obligatory prerequisite for success, however, is a high level of craftsmanship. The optical brilliance and visual diversity which characterise for example 'Aroma of Green Papayas' or the films by Yi-Mou and Kaige, are only seldom achieved in Europe or Hollywood. (Courtesy: Deutschland)



Farewell my Concubine

'M. Butterfly', a story based on Peking in the 60s, directed by David Cronenberg.