



An East Asian Studies Center Film Screening: *Yellow Jazz Black Music*

Marketus Presswood
Temple University Japan

**Sonicated Blackness in Jazz Age Shanghai,
1924–1954: Jazz, Community, and the (In)visibility of
African American Musicians in the Creation of the
Soundtrack of Chinese Modernity**

Jazz provided the soundtrack for Chinese modernity. To be modern in the Republican era (1919–1949) China, specifically in treaty port cities such as Shanghai, meant listening and dancing to American jazz music. It also engendered and embodied an alternative, nontraditional social space for the interaction of multiracial groups centered-around improvisational music. Mediated through African American jazz music, musicians from around the world collaborated, learned, listened, and played jazz in China. Whether the music heard originated directly from Black musicians themselves or entered the Shanghai soundscape through movies, radio, or the play of white or Asian musicians, the imprint of music created by Black creatives was ever-present. This film and discussion address the understudied topic of Black musicians and entertainers in Shanghai during the Republican era. African American jazz musicians and their Black musical aesthetics and traditions engendered and became constitutive of Chinese modernity. The film shows that the Black cultural production of jazz musicians not only helped fuel the cultural industry of Jazz Age Shanghai, it created alternative social spaces for the practice of a global internationalism and cosmopolitanism, and extended the Black Radical Tradition to Asia. The ubiquity of African Americans in Shanghai also exposed a manifestation of Chinese anti-Blackness from both Chinese Nationalists and Communists elements that would reveal racial fissures that would negatively impact the latter's relationship with Blackness at the inception of the Sino-Black solidarity movement from the 1930s onward to its collapse in the 1970s.

March 31, 2025

6:00-8:30pm

Pomerene Hall 160

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