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TEACHING ABOUT ASIA

Reflections on Teaching Chinese Language Films at American Colleges

Haili Kong
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“Film Studies” has become one of the fastest developing disciplines at liberal arts colleges in the United States since the early 1990s. Many factors have contributed to the growth of this new teaching field, among which is the fact that new generations of college students are more accustomed than ever before to visual learning due to the influence of media technology. Also with the growth of global studies, “film” is widely used as “cultural text” through which students learn about other national histories, cultures, and customs in a visualized way that is different from conventional text-reading. Chinese-language cinema, with perspectives and content distinctive from Western films, has become an innovative point in the development of Chinese studies curricula. China’s fast-paced economic development and the emergence of the Chinese cinematic movements (so-called “New Waves”) of the mid-1980s have also played critical roles in drawing increased attention to Chinese cinema in classrooms in the United States.

The Chinese cinematic New Waves emerged almost simultaneously in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in the 1980s.¹ Even though the rationales and motivations for filmmakers in these three geographical and political entities were quite different from each other, the cinematic products of the New Waves nevertheless were marked by similar characteristics. In contrast to the films previously made in greater China, films of the New Waves featured bold political challenges through their subject matter, innovations in audiovisual

design, unconventional camera work, and avant-garde narrative strategies. In the past 20-plus years, these films have received serious attention from international film critics and have won major awards at international film festivals. They have also emerged on college campuses, gradually becoming integrated into the regular curricula of film studies in the United States.

This essay focuses on three aspects of teaching Chinese-language cinema at American liberal arts colleges. The observations here are mainly based on my own experiences of teaching at Swarthmore College since 1994, interacting with colleagues at various liberal arts colleges, and contributing to research about Chinese-language cinema. The essay first discusses general approaches to teaching Chinese films, with an emphasis on thematic contents and aesthetic forms. It proceeds to introduce different teaching methods, including guiding students to perform onsite research and film production. It then concludes with suggestions for future improvements in teaching Chinese-language films at liberal arts colleges in the United States.

Thematic Contents

When Chinese films were first taught in the early 1990s, they were mainly offered in literature departments rather than in film studies. The chosen films were mainly adopted as alternative cultural texts to further foster students' general interest in China. Social and political aspects of the films received primary attention, mainly because films tend to reflect the historical contexts in which they are made and received. In this sense, the New Waves films reconstruct the processes and reflect upon the particular impacts of the unprecedented changes of the 1980s and after, such as economic reform in Mainland China, the anticipation of Hong Kong's handover in 1997, and the lifting of martial law in Taiwan. For most American college students, China has remained a mystery, even though Chinese language studies have been booming at both secondary and tertiary-level educational institutions since the 1990s, and educational exchange programs with China and tourist opportunities have become increasingly available. Naturally,

Chinese film courses have served mainly to enhance students' understanding of the changing modern China.

In the early 1990s, many teachers, myself included, were excited to discover the highly unconventional films produced by the Fifth Generation" filmmakers from Mainland China. These film directors belonged to an ambitious group of graduates of the Beijing Film Academy in 1982, whose creativity and talent had been suppressed during the ten-year Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Their films became sensational soon after the milestone film, Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984), won critical acclaim in Hong Kong. The film, through an ambiguous and avant-garde style of filmmaking, presented a political irony that subtly challenged official discourse on revolutionary history. Chen's distinctive arrangement of color, sound, and space created a shocking viewing experience for audiences. The film also left unanswered a series of questions, with an ambiguity that rarely occurred in the Chinese films produced by previous generations of filmmakers. Chen's classmate and cinematographer, Zhang Yimou, also made a series of films that featured color symbolism, such as *Red Sorghum* (1987), *Ju Dou* (1990), and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991). These films, together with Tian Zhuangzhuang's *Blue Kite* (1993), were mostly banned in China but won international acclaim and prestigious awards. These works were nurtured by significant ideological and cultural trends during the 1980s, such as the "root-seeking" (*xun gen*) and "culture fever" (*wenhua re*) movements². These movements initiated this young generation's critical rethinking of the past, the present, and the future—and of themselves as individuals—thus greatly liberating their minds' yearning for freedom and creativity. Because of this close tie between the Fifth Generation films and these cultural movements, the films were largely treated by college instructors as welcomed visual texts to supplement the teaching of literary works and social and cultural changes in contemporary China.

At the same time, teachers also realized the importance of covering films beyond the Fifth Generation films. For instance, with the intent of providing a larger picture of the evolution of

Chinese cinema and emphasizing the importance of studying films in historical contexts, I created a course called “History of Chinese Cinema: From Silent to Sound.” Through this course I taught films made in the 1930s and guided students to investigate how the movies reflected both historically specific social life and the limits and promises of cinematic technology all the way up to the twenty-first century. The expanded scope of this course offered a new way for students to learn Chinese culture, compare Chinese film at different stages with films of other national cinemas, and map the process of film’s evolution as an art form and an industry.

This wider scope of instruction has also included films made by Taiwan directors and movies that have been an integral part of Chinese-language films from the very beginning. Hou Hsiao-hsien’s works in particular reflected upon the changing political perspectives on the forbidden “February 28 Incident” in Taiwan³ and the new demand for political openness in the 1980s. His famous *The City of Sadness* (1989) was the first film to recount the tragic 1947 Incident through individual perspectives, and it could largely be considered a public visual eulogy and a call for remembering this event that had long been suppressed in collective memory of the people of Taiwan. Hou not only touched upon politically sensitive topics but also formulated his trademark cinematic style, featuring static camerawork, long takes, long shots, voiceovers and inter-texts, minimal drama, and prolonged silence—features that are simultaneously engaging and powerful. Considered as “one of the three directors most crucial to the future of cinema” according to a 1988 worldwide critics’ poll,⁴ Hou’s films are regularly featured in college-level cinema courses and film festivals on liberal arts campuses. Together with films by Ang Lee and Edward Yang, they explore how Taiwan society has experienced the process of modernization and globalization without giving up traditional Confucian ethical values and moral standards. Ang Lee’s *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994) and Edward Yang’s *Yi Yi* (One and a Two) (2001), for instance, have triggered lively discussions in my classes on family structure, generational gaps, and midlife crises in modern Taiwan.

In terms of Hong Kong cinema, most audiences in the West may still have an overwhelming impression of its martial art films and urban romances. Actually, the Hong Kong new wave films produced since the early 1980s have been offering audiences more sophisticated content and cinematic forms. In the early 1980s, the news of the upcoming 1997 handover to Mainland China immediately caused a variety of reactions from local intellectuals. Major Hong Kong New Wave directors, such as John Woo and Wong Kar-wai, developed their own cinematic languages to implicitly address prevalent public anxiety about the handover. For example, John Woo's *For a Better Tomorrow* (1986), his signature new urban gangster film, clearly represented his optimistic view of the future. By contrast, a series of Wong Kar-wai's fascinating and stylish films made audiences ponder the tremendous psychological impact of the upcoming handover on Hong Kong residents. His *Fallen Angels* (1985) and *In the Mood for Love* (2001), for instance, represented the Hong Kong mentality of both pre- and post-handover in terms of exploring new meanings or perspectives on time, space, and being, and largely illustrated individual Hong Kong residents' lives and their search for personal identity and belonging. The unique artistic style and ambiguous philosophical and existentialist themes of Wong's films had particular appeal to my students. Overall, Woo and Wong's films, and those of many other Hong Kong directors, have become preferred audiovisual texts that initiate students' critical thinking and stimulate classroom discussion on these sensitive sociopolitical turning points and related issues.

I have also found Chinese films pivotal in helping students develop insights into universal human situations and philosophical issues. Thus they can be taught as subjects that contribute to common curriculum. Despite language and cultural barriers, my students are generally able to relate to the characters of the films and render thoughtful reflections upon questions such as why and how do human beings exist; how do humans connect with different generations and their fellow humans; and what is life's meaning in this fast-changing, disappearing, and expiring modern space and physical time? The city as a living space, as constructed in Chinese films, for

example, can be very humane and attractive, but human beings can ironically also be very inhumane and cruel. The transformative relationship between human and machine (such as rickshaw, bicycle, and even the city itself) also demonstrates the naiveté of human desire and the destructive power of materialism. It is a kind of alienation, a question of being, belonging, and becoming, which everyone may have to think about sooner or later. In this sense, Wong Kar-wai's films, together with films by Wang Xiaoshuai, Zhang Yang, Jia Zhangke, and Tsai Mingliang,⁵ provide students with ample intellectual challenges that concern the understanding not only of China's past and present but also of their own existence as individuals and social beings.

Based on students' receptions, I have come to believe that theme-based courses, with their clearly defined focuses, are more enthusiastically embraced than more general survey courses of Chinese language films. Theme-oriented film courses that are currently offered at college level have focused on heroism, war and revolution, youth culture, urban and rural divide, among others—themes that also belong to artistic and formal genre studies. These theme-focused courses are structured to foster in-depth understanding of particular aspects of Chinese culture. For instance, a course entitled "What Makes a Chinese Hero?", offered at Kenyon College, can guide students to understand both traditional and changing modern concepts of a hero in China via reading both pre-modern and modern literary texts and viewing Chinese films. Films in such a course can serve to connect and bridge pre-modern and modern materials and thus make the pre-modern relevant and accessible to students' interest in modern China. In such a course, a comparative study of the character Mulan in its original Chinese text ("Ballad of Mulan") and in the contemporary Disney movie *Mulan* can shed light on theoretical issues such as cultural stereotyping, adaptation, and mass appeal. Focusing on a cultural heroine might also give rise to a more thorough engagement with topics related to feminism and film.

In response to the growing impact of Western theories of feminism and cultural studies, numerous essays and books were published in the early 1990s with an intense focus on how

women have been portrayed or positioned in Chinese-language films. These scholarly writings have also been increasingly integrated into college class discussions. For instance, there are quite a few sharp, critical commentaries on Zhang Yimou's early films, such as his three "reds" (*Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, and *Raise the Red Lantern*), noting Zhang's tendency of pleasing the "male gaze" and of propagating "Orientalist fabrications."⁶ Such commentaries are not only a reflection of a new pattern of film criticism on Chinese cinema, but also of the merging of Chinese film criticism with international cultural criticism in the context of the globalization, enabling students to expand their intellectual horizon.

Aesthetic Forms

Many Chinese-language films, particularly those from the New Waves, are now considered classics in the history of Chinese cinema. While these films' cultural and political dimensions are justifiably analyzed closely, teachers and students of Chinese cinema should also be prepared to explore and appreciate the films as artistic compositions. In fact, several research books on Chinese cinema in the 1990s were written or compiled by art historians who are not China experts. These scholars paid special attention to the shared image and frame composition between contemporary films and classical Chinese paintings. For instance, Linda Ehrlich compiled an essay collection on Chinese film, *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan*, which offers a special perspective through which to view the political films of the Fifth Generation, stressing that these films' artistic and intertextual analysis also prevailed in classical landscape paintings. These studies remind us of the importance of addressing the continuity of artistic heritage when we prepare to teach about cinematic innovations.

More often than not, discussions of aesthetic significance can enhance thematic interpretation of the film. For instance, in his analysis of *Yellow Earth*, Chris Berry points out that the landscape arrangement in the film appears to be associated with the traditional Chang'an painting school and thus implies the director's rejection of the aesthetics of socialist realism.⁷

Berry's emphasis on how artistic forms are loaded with meanings can lead our students to rethink why the apparently artistic experiments of the Fifth Generation filmmakers can be interpreted as politically pernicious by film censors of China.

As far as I know, most college teachers in the United States who teach Chinese film were originally trained in the field of Chinese literature or comparative literature.⁸ Naturally, their critical vision and analytical ability are different from those who are trained as art historians or film critics. Since the 1980s, thanks to the impact of this new trend of cultural criticism on Chinese studies, the mode of literary criticism has no longer been confined to close-reading and textual analysis, but has been expanded to an intertextual, social-contextual, and interdisciplinary scope. Concretely speaking, all the new “-isms,” including post-colonialism, feminism, post-structuralism, post-modernism, and so on, have all more or less shaped our teachers' previous training as well as our students' ways of thinking. As a positive result, the expansion of criticism has rendered a variety of new approaches for film criticism.

As many films were adapted from literary texts and the majority of teachers have literary backgrounds, I propose that it may be fruitful to compare the cinematic texts with their original literary texts and then explore the process of the adaptation. In this way, the analysis may explore how the filmmaker makes changes and may also reveal the differences between visual images and written words, including the resultant differences in receptions of the audience/reader. Conventionally, to be “loyal to the original literary text” (both in its thematic messages and the major plot) seems to be the goal of a cinematic adaption, but such loyalty is always difficult if not impossible to sustain. For the younger generation, however, cinematic adaption has simply meant “re-creation,” often with no consideration of faithfulness to the original text. They treat the original literary text simply as a base.

Among the New Wave directors, Chen Kaige has taken the lead in adapting literary works into films. His *Yellow Earth* is adapted from Ke Lan's “Silent Is the Ancient Plain,” a short story based on Ke's personal experience during the revolutionary era. Chen changed the title to *Yellow Earth* and made this

personal memoir-type story into a national allegory. In another instance, Zhang Yimou's acclaimed film *To Live* is based on Yu Hua's novel *To Live*. However, the film is quite different from the original text, not to mention its mood and tone of the narration; as Yu Hua once humorously commented, "After viewing Zhang Yimou's film *To Live* for the first time, I noticed something familiar in the film and felt that my novel somehow resembles his film in a way. However, I suddenly realized that it should be his film that resembles mine, not the opposite since mine is the original."⁹ Zhang Yimou also drastically adapted Su Tong's work of fiction *All Wife and Concubines* to the film *Raise the Red Lantern*, with a series of visual elements and symbolism added to enrich the viewers' imagination. Zhang also added several new cultural rituals, such as hanging red and black lanterns, massaging the feet, and transforming the roof into a new stage for the loners of the household in the story—all of which were Zhang's re-invention and re-enhancement of the audiovisual power of film. Therefore, it is helpful for our students to compare the original text with the cinematic adaptation so that they can not only find the differences but also have an opportunity to discuss and better understand the process of the transformation from the literary to the cinematic.

After the year 2000, this pattern, from faithful adaptation to re-creation, seemed to be further developed into more or less parodies of the original. If we can still call Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) a highly conceptualized historical allegory (adapted from an old legend about the assassin and the first emperor in China), then his *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) became an awkward imitation of Cao Yu's modern play *Thunderstorm* (1934).¹⁰ Zhang Yimou's *Happy Times* (2001) can also be read as a cheesy comedy at the expense of losing the seriousness of social critique and sarcastic bite that characterized Mo Yan's short story from which the film was adapted. Why have some well-known filmmakers led the way in turning cinematic adaptations from serious literature into kitschy parodies in the past decade? Is it an impact of irresistible commercialism? This might be an interesting topic worthy of both research and classroom discussion.

In my own classroom discussions I also pay special attention to the films' audiovisual effects, which is one of most important elements of film itself that requires our students' intellectual engagement. How to effectively use sound and accompanying music always preoccupies filmmaking, and analysis of this often forgotten aspect of filmmaking has been calling for attention in both teaching and researching. The use of music in contemporary Chinese language films has become more sophisticated and powerful, providing fertile ground for lively classroom discussions. Zhang Yimou often uses folk music to create a contrasting or even ironic feeling, especially in death scenes of his films (particularly in *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern*).¹¹ Jiang Wen, by contrast, adopted Soviet songs and Italian music in his *In the Heat of the Sun* (1995) in order to enhance the social atmosphere and stir up a generational nostalgia and special sentiments for that disappeared revolutionary era as well as for viewers' own energetic youth. Prominently, Wong Kar-wai's films such as *Fallen Angels* and *In the Mood for Love* are full of Spanish love songs and Argentina tango and other romantic dance music, whose strong and haunting rhythms and exotic melodies highlight the floating lifestyle and uncertain personal identity of the postmodern world. I usually encourage music majors in my film class to do in-class presentations and term papers on the use of music in the films, and these efforts have often contributed a special perspective to our class discussion and facilitated our understanding of the film.

The fascinating cinematography itself also deserves pedagogical attention, particularly given that one of China's most established directors, Zhang Yimou, was first trained as a photographer. The use of camera, the control of light and sound, the montage, and the special audiovisual effects are gradually becoming objects for both research and teaching. This more technologically involved subject often requires our literature-trained teachers to continue learning about more technical aspects of film and our students to acquire basic knowledge of film too, which is an important part of interdisciplinary training.¹²

Teaching Platforms and Future Suggestions

When Chinese film courses first emerged at American colleges, most of them served as introductions to Chinese culture and societies. The films were often viewed and used as a window or mirror for students to see social change and understand Chinese history and society. However, recently teachers have felt the urge to engage students not only as consumers and critics of images but also active producers of images. In a creative course designed at Colgate University, students spend a semester studying the subject of the Chinese city on campus, with assignments such as watching Beijing-related films and reading relevant books (see the article by John A. Crespi in this issue of *ASIANetwork Exchange*). Then the instructor leads them to Beijing for three weeks, where they are required to complete their individual final projects in the form of digitized documentary films that show Beijing city from their individual perspectives. Such a course enables both students and teachers to be actively engaged in the process of teaching and studying the city of Beijing. Offering this kind of course may be costly, but it is welcomed by both teachers and students and worth trying if a college budget allows.

I myself have experimented with teaching a double-credit senior/honors seminar with a special focus on three major filmmakers, Zhang Yimou, Wong Kar-wai, and Ang Lee. Entitled "The Remaking of Cinematic China," the seminar is regularly offered at Swarthmore and has attracted many students (not only seniors) in spite of its heavy load (screening 34 films a semester plus a long reading list). The seminar offers students with ample opportunities to conduct research on these three filmmakers as individual artists and on their cinematic achievements, and to have discussions in class or via Blackboard on thematic concerns and cinematic characteristics. Each individual student is also required to prepare and raise a series of questions on each film and take turns leading seminar discussions once a week. The success of such a course demonstrates that interested students are very well engaged and willing to go even deeper to explore and research selected Chinese filmmakers in whom they are interested.

Chinese language films have also been widely used for language teaching. Chosen episodes, or even a whole movie, are often used as audiovisual texts for Mandarin Chinese language courses beyond intermediate levels. Teachers at Hamilton College pioneered the transcription and use of Chinese-language films such as Chen Kaige's *Farewell, My Concubine* (1993) as linguistic materials to teach upper-level Chinese-language courses. The students are required to not only understand the content of the films but also narrate the films, analyze their characteristics, and write essays on aspects of them. More recently, Princeton and Yale have also published textbooks mainly focusing on Chinese-language films. Luying Chen's article in this special section addresses details using these textbooks with the specific needs of liberal arts students in mind.

Since Chinese film has only recently emerged as a field of research and teaching, there are naturally gaps that require further efforts before we can say that our understanding of Chinese-language film is systematic if not complete. As Zhang Yingjin¹³ pointed out at a recent pedagogy workshop held at Smith College on teaching Chinese cinema, literature, and culture, "The period of socialist Chinese cinema (1949-66) may have been accidentally ignored, or may just simply be missing from our classroom teaching as well as our research."¹⁴ We should rethink the value of films produced during this period, particularly their contribution to the imagination of collective identity in a newly built nation-state and assimilation of potentially subversive views and positions. Currently, Hamilton College offers several film-related courses, such as "Recalling the Chinese Revolution through Film" and "Modern China through Film," in which several films made during the Mao era are chosen for use, such as the well-known "red classics" *Song Jingshi* (1955, about a peasant-rebellion leader in the late Qing dynasty), *Guerrillas on the Railway* (1956, about the Communist-led guerrillas during the Sino-Japanese war), and *Song of the Youth* (1959, about the student movement during the 1930s Nationalist China). These films from socialist China are adopted in cinema class to show how the twentieth-century revolution was narrated

and represented on screen. This should be a good experiment in further developing Chinese language film teaching at colleges.

At Swarthmore and elsewhere, teachers have begun to take advantage of Blackboard to do film “streaming” for students to watch films at their convenience. While this new development of technology is handy for both teachers and students, it also needs a lot of technical support and help from the language lab or information technicians for pre-teaching preparation, such as uploading information (including reading documents and selected films) onto Blackboard. The only concern, or disadvantage, particularly in courses studying cinematic technique, is that the film’s special audiovisual effects, so apparent on big screens, are often less evident on the small personal computers typically used for Blackboard film “streaming.”. How to address this issue remains a question for us to explore and solve.

To summarize, when we review the history of offering a variety of courses on Chinese language films at many liberal arts colleges in the past 20 years, we notice that teaching Chinese films has been playing an important role in a healthy and steadily growing development of the curriculum in Chinese or Asian studies programs nationwide. Chinese films are used in different types of classrooms at our colleges, from adopting episodes as visual and linguistic examples in classes of language, history, political science, and culture, to screening carefully chosen films in order to conduct serious film research on certain periods, filmmakers, or chosen themes for courses in film studies or senior seminars. The field of Chinese-language cinema continues to develop vigorously. We can all look forward to welcoming more new films into our classrooms and presenting their cinematic innovations and intellectual challenges to our students in the near future.

Recommended Reading List

General

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Hong Kong

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Taiwan Cinema

Davis, D. and Chen Ruxiu. *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

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Film Theory and General History

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Monographs on Major Directors

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Useful websites

<http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/filmbib.htm>

Endnotes

¹Originally the New Waves in the three parts of Greater China were labeled differently. In Mainland China, the emergence of the Fifth

Generation filmmakers and their films was considered as New Wave, which may also encompass the later, or sixth, generation. In Hong Kong, the New Wave began in the late 1970s, but mainly refers to the Second New Wave represented by John Woo (urban gangster films, such as *For a Better Tomorrow*, in the mid-1980s) and Wong Kar-wai. The “Taiwan New Cinema” wave was initiated by a group of local young directors who were born or grew up during or after the Chinese Civil War (1946–1949), among whom Hou Hsiao-hsien was the lead. Hou’s *The Boys from Feng Kuei* in 1983, released one year earlier than *Yellow Earth* on the mainland, caught the international film critics’ attention and became a Golden Montgolfiere winner and a milestone in the history of Taiwanese films.

²As an intellectual movement mixed with popular cultural demands, “culture fever” became one of the most distinguished features of 1980s China and involved the fields of literature, films, arts, music, and so on. What some intellectuals considered the “spiritual isolation” of China during Mao’s era came to an end. Then fresh ideas, new forms of arts, and even popular music and songs from the outside world that came through the open door ignited a cultural fever that stimulated critical thinking about values for the individual and the nation. For more details about these cultural movements, see Jing Wang’s book, *High Culture Fever—Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng’s China*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

³The controversial February 28 Incident in 1947 refers to the Nationalist government crack down on anti-Nationalist sentiment and resistance from the local residents of Taiwan after the Nationalists took over Taiwan. Thousands of people were killed during Incident and more arrested during and after it. Only after martial law” was lifted in 1987 was the Incident allowed to be discussed in public and to be represented in film.

⁴See <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0396284/bio>.

⁵For instance, Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Beijing Bicycle* (2001), Zhang Yang’s *Shower* (1999) and Sunflower (2005), Jia Zhangke’s *World* (2004), and Tsai Mingliang’s *Vive l’Amour* (1996).

⁶For more details, see Lu Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of Taiwan and Mainland China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁷See Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar, “Post-Socialist Strategies: An Analysis of *Yellow Earth* and *Black Cannon Incident*,” in *Cinematic Landscapes*, ed. by Linda C. Ehrlich and David Desser. (Austin: University of Texas, 1994), 81-100.

⁸While I don't have any exact statistics to support my statement here, virtually none of our liberal arts colleges in the United States could afford to hire a specifically trained Chinese cinema expert who did not also have the capacity to teach Chinese language and literature. It may also be telling that all five authors of essays on Chinese film included in this special section are without exception trained in the field of literature. Only a few colleges (mainly research universities) have a handful of faculty members, such as Zhang Zhen at New York University, who make their home bases in film studies rather than Chinese or Asian studies programs.

⁹Presentation by Yu Hua, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Penn., March 23, 2009.

¹⁰Cao Yu (1910-1996) was one of the most famous modern Chinese playwrights, and his first and arguably the best play was *Thunderstorm* (1934). *Thunderstorm* is about complex relationships within a wealthy but morally corrupt family and the destructive consequences of incest and patriarchal structure. The play may reveal some obvious marks of Western influences, such as the Oedipus complex and the ancient Greek theater. It was said that Zhang Yimou did contact Cao Yu's family for consent about the similarity between *Thunderstorm* and his *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) before Zhang started making this film.

¹¹In his early films, Zhang liked to use children kettles in death scenes, such as when Tian Bai killed both his legal father Jin Shan and his biological father Tian Qing in *Ju Dou*, and when the third wife was being sent to the death tower in *Raise the Red Lantern*. Such lighthearted kettles coming out with the most tragic death scenes often created an ironic atmosphere with a horrifying haunting effect over audiences.

¹²As mentioned above, teachers originally not trained in film may need some further training for better teaching of film courses.

¹³Zhang Yingjin is Professor of Chinese, Comparative Literature, and Film Studies at the University of California, San Diego. He is one of the major Chinese film scholars in the United States.

¹⁴A Pedagogy Workshop on Teaching Chinese Cinema, Literature and Culture, entitled "China Through the Modern Lens" was held on March 5 and 6, 2010 at Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Teachers from Amherst College, Colgate University, Grinnell College, Rutgers University, Smith College, Swarthmore College, Trinity University, University of California, San Diego, and University of Pennsylvania participated in this inspiring workshop organized by Professor Sujane Wu from Smith College.