

Teaching Chinese Film in an Advanced Language Class

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Instructors often face a dilemma when using film in language classes. While film is appealing for the rich cultural and linguistic information it offers, finding the balance between teaching content and building language skills can present significant challenges for an instructor. Common approaches to using film in courses taught in English, such as screening one film a week, reading critical essays about the films, and class discussions and lectures, seldom offer the same benefits in a foreign language course due to the fact that students with only three years of foreign language study frequently lack the language skills necessary to discuss films in a foreign language. Yanfang Tang and Qianghai Chen, authors of the textbook *Advanced Chinese: Intention, Strategy, & Communication* (2005), have argued that “[n]either interpreting textual meanings nor decoding linguistic patterns leads naturally to the productive skills needed” for communicating in the target language at the advanced level.¹ They further suggest that “practice, in a conscious but meaningful way is the key to successful transformation of input knowledge into productive output skills.”²

When we use films in language classes, the focus is for students to understand the textual meanings and linguistic patterns within the film, but training productive output skills in students, while fostering cultural proficiency and developing critical thinking skills, can prove to be somewhat difficult to accomplish within normal classroom time constraints. Recently published textbooks, including *Readings in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Chou, 2008, hereafter *Readings*)³ and *Discussing Everything Chinese* (Li-li Teng Foti, et al., 2007, hereafter *Discussing*)⁴, have recognized this challenge and

experimented with different approaches to using Chinese film in advanced language classes. However, effective classroom instruction often depends on the instructor's creative arrangement and presentation of materials to encourage students whose academic interests and goals of language learning can be very different.

In my own experience teaching fourth-year level Chinese classes, previously at Valparaiso University and currently at St. Olaf College, Chinese language films comprised a significant component of each course. I aim to share how I have specifically adopted two lessons from *Discussing* to keep language teaching as a main goal for these types of courses, and how integration of literature and comparative literature can enhance the teaching of critical thinking and empathy. I will also discuss how this approach can be translated into teaching an entire course on Chinese film using *Readings*, which offers a synopsis, a critique, and transcriptions of selected dialogues for each of ten well-known films produced since the 1980s from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

How to Compare Two World Famous Directors in a Third of an Advanced Chinese Language Course?

The first lesson in *Discussing*, "Chinese Film Directors Zhang Yimou and Ang Lee," offers a comparison of the subject matter and artistic styles of these two best-known Chinese directors' works and their respective life experiences, as well as their national and international receptions. The second lesson, "A Look at Modern Chinese History Through Zhang Yimou's *To Live*," provides a more in-depth study of a film that covers major historical periods of modern China—the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the Civil War (1945-1949), the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Each lesson is divided into two parts, which use a vocabulary list showing examples of the words' usage in different contexts. The exercises following each lesson primarily focus on the linguistic goals of an advanced Chinese course: narration at paragraph-length discourse, summary, discussion, essay writing, and presentation.

I find it most effective to start with the analysis of *To Live* before moving on to generalities like comparing the two filmmakers. I also adapt Foti's frame of thinking to design the main teaching objectives of the unit: introduce the directors; compare the overall subject matter of the films, their different artistic styles, and receptions; and discuss how their films reflect modern and contemporary Chinese society and history, cross-cultural conflicts, and the conflicts between tradition and modernity. To balance depth and breadth and vary classroom activities, I organize the unit into three segments. Part I (Day 1-Day 7) is a close study of *To Live* when students learn the basic vocabulary to summarize the plot, examine major motifs, and critique the film's representation of history. Part II (Day 8) is a discussion of *The Story of Qiu Ju* (Zhang Yimou, 1992) for students to practice their newly acquired skill for summarizing films. Part III (Days 9-10) consists of students' presentations on six other films introduced in the textbook.

The close study of *To Live* starts with an in-class showcase of key scenes after students have already watched the film outside of class. The main objective of the first day is to understand the essence of key scenes and to review the plot in preparation for discussion. Themes of discussion are culturally specific, including the Daoist perspective on the change of fortune, the family as the source of strength to survive political catastrophes, the role of art, and the people's role in political movements. The change of fortune is best illustrated through two clips involving the main character Fugui and Long'er, who had schemed to win Fugui's family fortune through gambling, causing the family's collapse when Fugui's father dies of anger and his wife Jiazhen, who is pregnant, to leave with their young daughter. A humbled Fugui comes to Long'er's house—which used to be Fugui's ancestor's house—to borrow money to make a new beginning after Jiazhen returns with their two children. Instead of money, Long'er condescendingly lends Fugui a box with puppets. This scene can be contrasted with a highly ironic later scene, in which Long'er is publicly executed by the communist government in the 1950s because of his unwillingness to share his property with the people. Fugui's reaction to the

sound of gunshot aimed at Long'er, as if he was being shot, and the dialogue between him and his wife (Chou, 300-302) vividly demonstrate an ironic twist of fate. Had he not lost his house, he would have been executed as a rich landlord just like Long'er.

The two scenes that focus on family relationships mainly involve Fugui and his son Youqing. In the first scene, Fugui beats Youqing after the boy pours a bowl of hot and sour noodles on another boy for bullying his deaf sister Fengxia. The other boy's father accuses Fugui's family of "sabotaging the revolution." Jiazhen blames Fugui for beating Youqing, while Fengxia reunites the family by inviting them all to eat dinner together. The next scene has Fugui carrying Youqing to school to attend a political event. The boy is still asleep after a night of participating in the Great Leap Forward movement in which the community was involved in making enough steel to "surpass England and America." Fugui speaks dreamily, both to Youqing and himself, about a better future. He says that their family is a chicken right now, but the chicken will grow up to become a goose, the goose will grow up to become a sheep, and the sheep will become a cow. After the cow, communism will be realized. That day, after the long night's work, Youqing is accidentally killed by a car driven by Chunsheng, Fugui's war-time friend who is now a governmental official. Class discussion of these scenes focuses on the parent-child relationship in China. The last scene is also important when discussing the role of the individual: Is Fugui partly responsible for Youqing's death?

The next four showcased scenes occur during and after the period of the Cultural Revolution. In the first scene, Fugui is asked to burn his puppets, in spite of his willingness to use them as political propaganda. The burning of the puppets symbolizes the total destruction of art during this period. The second scene portrays Fengxia's wedding, when posters with revolutionary themes, a song in praise of Chairman Mao as a wedding vow, and a gift from Chunsheng including a collection of Chairman Mao's writings indicate the marriage between art and politics, as well as political control of private spheres. In the third scene, Chunsheng, who is now being persecuted by the Red Guards, says good-bye and foretells his suicide. Echoing the title of the

film, Fugui tells Chunsheng they have to live no matter what happens. The last scene shows Fugui's grandchild Mantou playing with baby chicks in the box that used to hold the family puppets after a visit to Fengxia's grave. When the grandchild asks about what will become of the chickens when they grow up, Fugui repeats what he used to say to his son about the chickens turning into cows, but then remains silent in an obvious departure from the blind following of communist ideology.

Days 2 and 3 of the lessons are devoted to the study of the narrative summary and critique of the film in the textbook, with special focuses on vocabulary and sentence structure learning. Day 4 evaluates vocabulary learning through a quiz, after which the class uses the vocabulary to discuss important motifs in the film by recalling the key scenes. Students are then assigned an outline for a longer essay, either around the introduced motifs or a topic of their own choice, in preparation for Day 5 of class.

The discussion of the film deepened on Day 5 when perspectives from cultural criticism and comparative literature are introduced, and the roles of individuals during political movements are reviewed as a means to teach culture, critical thinking, and empathy. Students in my previous classes articulated how watching the film changed their view of people's lives during the Cultural Revolution, appreciation of the Chinese people's spirit of survival, the strength of family relationship, as well as criticism of the communist government. Students said they could easily feel sympathy for the Chinese people in the film, although they had a hard time accepting that the "party" is represented by "party members" such as the town chief, who appears to be totally innocent in the film.

Although I usually hesitate to use class period to discuss scholarly articles not in Chinese, I have found briefly introducing the main arguments from related articles can significantly raise the level of critical thinking in students. For the sake of deepening discussion about Chinese people's need to survive, I introduced Rey Chow's article "We Endure, Therefore We Are: Survival, Governance and Zhang Yimou's *To Live*."⁵ In Chow's opinion, the two characters who embody a defiant spirit are Youqing and Chunsheng. Youqing's pouring the bowl of noodle on the

bullying boy's head is an action of protest, while Fugui's public spanking of Youqing is analogical to the party's discipline of the people. Instead of succumbing to his father's discipline, Youqing remains unapologetic and defiant, as he later gives a bowl of hot and sour tea to his father and interrupts his puppet performance. This is a symbolic protest against the father's power as well as the political order because at the time Fugui's art has become an accomplice of the political movement. Chow also sees Chunsheng's hint at suicide as equally defiant.

At this point in the discussion, critical empathy becomes a natural part of the learning goal. The questions I ask the class involve how much action an individual can take during a political movement and whether the issues seen in the film are primarily a "Chinese" problem or whether they concern a more universal human condition. Comparing *To Live* with the Italian film *Life is Beautiful* (Roberto Benigni, 1997) and the Austrian film *Sunshine* (István Szabô, 1999), which are introduced through a short lecture, further the discussion of these questions. *Life is Beautiful* is a film about how a Jewish father teaches his son to survive a Nazi camp by encouraging the boy to think about life in the camp as a game to win a toy tank. It has the most upbeat tone, to the extent that it is unrealistic. However, its celebration of the spirit of human survival offers a different perspective from Chow's critique that survival is a common Chinese mentality. *Sunshine*, which tells the story of three generations of a Jewish family dealing with Nazi Germany, also celebrates the spirit to survive through the character of the grandmother. The film contains a voice as equally critical of passivity as that of Chow's, when the older brother of the family who chooses the revolutionary path while his brother joined the German army, confronts the nephew who has been persecuted in a Nazi camp: What if the entire Jewish group took action in front of the Nazi soldiers of a much smaller number? That question could be asked of all of us. What individual action would we have taken, if we were in such a situation? The purpose of asking such questions was not to seek an answer, but to conduct an exercise to make studying the target language and a foreign culture not an activity of objectifying the Chinese

people and seeing them as victims. It returns learning to a level of self-reflection.⁶

Day 6's assignment discusses the representations of history through a comparison of the film version of Youqing's beating by his father and their reconciliation with a corresponding scene in Chinese writer Yu Hua's novel *To Live*, on which the film is based.⁷ In the beginning of chapter seven of the novel, Fugui beats Youqing because the boy wants to quit school in order not to be a burden to the family. Their reconciliation occurs when Fugui, out of guilt, buys a sheep and Youqing, despite his wish to remain defiant, cannot help expressing his fondness for the sheep. This reconciliation does not serve as strong a political motif as the one in the film. Compared with the film, which is distressing, comedic, and yet melancholically hopeful, the novel uses dark humor and is much more pessimistic. The class discussion also touches upon the melodramatic features seen in both the visual and written texts. In short, the "look" at Chinese history moves far beyond that of the textbook. Students often demonstrate this through the presentations of their essays on Day 7, which are written after their receipt of feedback on their assigned outlines from Day 4.

The two additional components of this film unit are designed to achieve breadth. Part II (Day 8) is a discussion on *The Story of Qiu Ju* (Zhang Yimou, 1992) as a change of rhythm. Students watch the film before class and are asked to prepare a summary of the plot. Class activities focus on guiding students to understand a film about an ordinary Chinese citizen's fight for basic human rights, a situation in China about which students are much concerned, and the conflict between the governing of law and the long tradition of how society functions through human relationships (expressed in the untranslatable concept of *renqing* 人情).

The third and last segment of the class unit is comprised of student pair or individual presentations on Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) and *Hero* (2002), and Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* (1994), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), and *Pushing Hands* (1992). Depending on the size of the class, the number of films

that can be introduced, and days required for the presentations, can vary. Each group watches its designated film closely, writes a short summary of the film, selects key scenes to transcribe, turns the dialogue into narration, and provides a glossary to share with the class. In class, each group performs a 15-minute presentation, followed by a “question and answer” session. The goal is not for the entire class to gain a deep understanding of all the films, but to apply the skill of close analysis that they have learned, to learn from their peers’ work, and to be motivated to watch the films at their own leisure. The instructor’s role is to help students prepare for their presentations and to ensure quality scene selections and presentations.

The unit ends with a brief comparison of the two filmmakers on the last day of presentations and an oral exam. During the oral exam, students discuss the film they had presented, with more refined language and in paragraph-length discourse. The feedback in the unit evaluations that have been received in the past has been very positive. Students have described the presentation as a fun project with many opportunities for learning, and they also enjoyed learning from their peers.

How to Design an Entire Course on Chinese Films?

The above format is not the only way to organize a unit on Chinese film, nor is my sharing intended as a manual for film teaching. It is rather an invitation for instructors interested in the subject to continue to explore how instructors can use a textbook creatively and how disciplinary training can enrich a language class. I am fully aware that teaching a successful film class in Chinese will involve contributions of ideas from colleagues with various backgrounds and will take years of experimentation. For example, I learned that a handout with specific questions to guide plot summary is necessary to foster discussion, that two days should be used (instead of one) to show a film that is not meant to be closely studied, and that an interactive format of lecturing while reviewing several key scenes can be a more effective approach to discussions.

Thinking beyond a textbook has returned me to *Readings in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* to see how the above

approach can be used and adapted to teach an entire course on “Twentieth-Century China in Film” in three to four units. The lessons in the textbook can be reorganized around the following topics: Rural and Urban China in Transformation (Lessons 1, 2, and 4), An Alternative Imagination of Pre-1949 China (Lessons 3 and 5), Tradition and Modernity Across the Taiwan Strait (Lessons 6 and 7), and The Cultural Revolution (Lessons 8, 9, and 10). My following discussion forgoes the fourth topic here listed as Jin Feng’s article deals specifically with films about the Cultural Revolution. My brief discussion of related films such as *Xiuxiu* 秀秀 (*The Sent Down Girl*, Joan Chen 1998) and *Bawang bieji* 霸王别姬 (*Farewell My Concubine*, Chen Kaige, 1993), as well as their use in advanced language classes, can be found in the attached note.⁸

Unit 1: Rural and Urban China in Transformation

This unit can be organized into three parts: a close study of *Not One Less* (Zhang Yimou, 1999; Chou 1-35), a shorter study of *A Sigh* (Feng Xiaogang 2000; Chou 36-61), and student presentations. The teaching objectives can include: the Reform and Open Door Policy in 1978, the historical and social background of China’s resident system and the huge gap between urban and rural China, and the representation of the countryside and the city and social migration.

Part I: Close study of Yige dou buneng shao

—一个都不能少 (Not One Less) (5-6 days)

Set in a remote mountainous village in 1990s mainland China, the film centers on Wei Minzhi, a 13-year-old girl who is substituting for a village teacher for one month and promised additional pay if she does not lose any students. Initially only interested in getting her menial salary, Wei’s effort to search for Zhang Huike, a naughty boy who takes off in search of work in the big city, turns her into a true “teacher.” Through documentary style depictions of a dilapidated classroom containing multiple grades of pupils and the teacher and pupil’s often helpless experiences in the city, the film captures the huge gap between the conditions in urban and rural China.

A review of major clips from the film should include the scenes that depict the means of communication, such as the scenes involving students copying textbooks; Wei teaching the students to sing a song; the “textual representation” of Zhang Huike, which the announcer at the bus stop uses to look for him; the missing person notice Wei writes in order to look for Zhang; Wei speaking to Zhang through the video camera at the TV station; Zhang Huike speaking to the reporters from the TV station about how he wishes to repay the kindness of his teacher when he grows up and sharing that his most vivid memory of the city is begging; and the children writing characters with hopeful meanings on the blackboard with colorful chalks donated by people in the city, in contrast with the white characters on a black screen at the end of the film announcing that millions of Chinese children do not have a school to attend.

Most of these scenes have been transcribed in *Reading*. However, the dialogues are mostly in a local dialect. Since learning dialect is not a priority in a language course teaching Mandarin, the use of transcripts is very important. The critique and synopsis is especially suitable for students at the beginning of fourth-year Chinese. To do a more in-depth critique of the film, the instructor may assign a short article by Rey Chow, “Not One Less: the Fable of Migration,” and ask students to summarize its main points, in order to prepare for the discussion of the film.⁹

Part II: Yisheng Tanxi—*一声叹息* (A Sigh, Feng Xiaogang 2000) (2 days at most)

A Sigh is set in Beijing in the 1990s and follows Liang Yazhou, a professional writer, who is married and has a daughter, but falls in love with an actress. The two live together for some time but Liang eventually returns to his patient wife who has chosen to wait for his return by painting their newly purchased apartment. As one of the earliest films to reflect the changes happening to Chinese society, such as moral standards and personal relationships, since the economic reform, this film also introduces a fairly new phenomenon in socialist China: families starting to purchase housing. Teaching this film can start with a

review of the major scenes along with their transcription. There is not enough time to teach the synopsis and critique along with the goal of having students produce the language. However, these tools can be used for a translation exercise to check reading comprehension. Students can try to summarize the film in their own words after reading the critique and synopsis.

Part III (2-3 days): Student Projects and Presentations

Selection of texts for presentations can be flexible depending on students' disciplinary background and academic interests. Those more interested in film as an art form may be interested in comparing *Not One Less* with *Wo de fuqin muqin* 我的父亲母亲 (*The Road Home*, Zhang Yimou, 1999). With stunning visual effects, the latter film focuses on a son's recollection of the sacrifice made by his father, who belonged to an earlier generation of intellectuals with an idealism to improve education in the countryside. The film in Lesson 4, *Laojing* 老井 (*Old Well*, Wu Tianming, 1986) is an option for showing the countryside before an economic reform characterized by the formidable power of traditional beliefs (the attachment to one's old home, arranged marriage, and the discrimination against a man married into a wife's house) and the younger generation's hope to use knowledge to change backwardness. *Shiqi sui de danche* (*Beijing Bicycle*, Wang Xiaoshuai, 2001) and *He ni zai yiqi* (*Together*, Chen Kaige, 2002) are films distinct in their depictions of the city-rural interactions through the migrant workers' experience in Beijing. Students with a background in sociology may want to read newspaper articles or use news reports about children left behind in the countryside when their parents become migrant workers in the big cities. An extended topic from *A Sigh* can focus on the changing women's status and marriage customs since the late 19th century. For an historical perspective of women in pre-1949 China, the documentary *The Great Step Forward: Chinese Women in the 20th Century* includes excellent clips from interviews with women who lived through arranged marriages, some of whom later followed the path of revolution.

Unit 2: An Alternative Imagination of Pre-1949 China

Much of canonical modern Chinese literature depicts the era of the 1940s as chaotic and tragic. In the official Chinese terminology, pre-1949 belonged to “Old China” and could only be transformed through revolution. With two little girls at the center of the stories, and portraying ordinary people at the margin of society in the 1940s, both *Bianlian* 变脸 (*The King of Masks*, Wu Tianming, 1996) and *Cheng nan jiu shi* 城南旧事 (*My Memories of Old Beijing*, Wu Yigong, 1983) give two refreshing perspectives on this time period. *King of Masks*, a product of the market economy in the 1990s to reimagine Chinese history, tells the story of humanity’s triumph over the political and social institutions through the perseverance and bravery of one little girl, Gou’er (Doggie). Gou’er was sold disguised as a boy by a kidnapper to the lone elderly street folk artist, Wang, as a grandson. Wang believes in passing on his family art to a male inheritor and refuses to teach Gou’er the “real secret” of his art when he discovers Gou’er is female. She finally changes Wang’s heart after she risks her life like the Bodhisattva Guanyin in a play she has watched. *My Memories of Old Beijing*, adapted from a memoir of the same title by Lin Haiyin (1918-2001), written in 1960 when she had moved to Taiwan,¹⁰ is told from the perspective of Yingzi, a girl from a well-to-do and loving family. The life of ordinary people unravels through Yingzi’s interaction with three people: a mad woman who lives in a world of fantasy after her lover—a progressive youth—disappeared and their daughter was abandoned immediately after birth, a thief whose entire hope is in the success of his younger brother, and the family maid Song Ma who is forced to leave her children due to family hardship. Its adaptation from a memoir by an author with a transnational background (Lin was born in Japan, lived in Beijing from age five to 30, and moved to Taiwan in 1948) also gives this film many materials for discussion. The selected scenes and the critique in the textbook are also easy to use. For these reasons, this film can be chosen for closer study.

One approach to the topic of memory and representation is to compare one episode in the film with an equivalent part in the memoir. *King of Masks* contains many idioms and sayings of folk wisdom that students should learn to understand though not necessarily to use. It can be covered in two days by going over the transcribed scenes. The topic of child-abandonment will likely come up during discussions, so the instructor may want to prepare a short lecture ahead of time. Student projects can continue to compare the film and the memoir by Lin Haiyin, compare the various versions of the Bodhisattva (Guanyin) story to discuss the reinvention of tradition, or study other Chinese folk art forms.

Unit 3: Tradition and Modernity Across the Taiwan Strait

Chinese cultural tradition affecting modern China is a theme that appears in the majority of films in Chow's textbook. Ang Lee's *Yinshi nannü* 饮食男女 (*Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*, 1994) and Zhang Yang's *Xizao* 洗澡 (*Shower*, 1999) provide a good opportunity to compare and contrast the respective settings in Taipei and Beijing and the shared theme of families living in conflicts between tradition and modernity. Lee's film chooses to let the drama unfold in scenes around the family dinner table in which audiences see how the "traditional" Confucian thinking of obligations has become a burden to all in the family. "Modernity" is represented by the wish for greater personal freedom. Freedom includes being a Christian, choosing a career over a loveless relationship, and marrying at a young age or, in the father's case, marrying a woman his daughter's age. A similar alienation within family can be seen in *Shower*, though the social context is more focused on a city in transformation. "Tradition" is embodied in the main character Old Liu and the bathhouse he runs with his mentally challenged younger son in Beijing, marked by an appreciation of traditional art objects and close relationships among neighbors. By contrast, "modernity" is associated with the southern city of Shenzhen where Liu's older son has been working, and the son's emotionless face and silence. Father and son are reconciled one rainy night when the son helps mend the leaking roof shortly

before the father's death. Any nostalgia toward the past is subtly balanced when the father expresses the inevitability of the tearing down of the bathhouse and many older buildings because they are aged and cannot be mended. A protest against the cost of developing is nevertheless voiced through the refusal of the younger son to leave the bathhouse and to be confined in a mental hospital.

It is a hard decision to choose one film over the other as a text for closer study, therefore the classes can be divided equally between them. The textbook has scene transcriptions related to the above highlighted themes, which are all easy to teach and to practice for language output. Study of the narrative synopsis and critique can be selective, both for translation or reading comprehension and for preparing class discussions. The study of the characters in *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* in the textbook (Chou 140-147) is an excellent preparation for teaching critical thinking, as is the representation of "tradition" vs. "modernity" in both films. A starting discussion and end-of-unit essay can include students' reflections on generational gaps and familial relationships, which in the past, some of my students have enjoyed, while others preferred to avoid.

Overall, it is important to be prepared and yet remain flexible. Instructors often have more control when designing some linguistic tasks. However, students' contributions can often inspire the directions discussions can go and it is important to seize such moments.

Endnotes

¹Yanfang Tang and Qianghai Chen, *Advanced Chinese: Intention, Strategy, & Communication* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), xii.

²*Ibid.*, xii.

³Chi-p'ing Chou et al., *Readings in Contemporary Chinese Cinema: A Textbook of Advanced Modern Chinese* (Princeton: Princeton Language Program, 2008).

⁴Li-Li Teng Foti et al., *Discussing Everything Chinese*, Vol. 2. (CreateSpace, 2007).

⁵Rey Chow, "We Endure, Therefore We Are: Survival, Governance, and Zhang Yimou's *To Live*" in *Primitive Passions* (*South Atlantic*

Quarterly 95, no. 4, Fall 1996), 1057-64. Another article that suits the topic is by Rujie Wang, “*To Live Beyond Good and Evil*” (*Asian Cinema* 12:1, Spring/Summer 2001), 74-90.

⁶These goals appear in ACTFL’s “National Standards for Foreign Language Education” <http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3392>

⁷Yu Hua, *To Live: A Novel*. Tr. Michael Berry (New York: Anchor Books, 2003).

⁸In this unit, *To Live* can be taught first because it stretches the history of the entire 20th century China from the War of Resistance against Japanese invasion (1937-1945) until before the economic reform of the 1980s. *Farewell My Concubine* shifts between the performance of an ancient story involving the tragic love of Xiang Yu (232–202 B.C.) and his concubine before his loss to Liu Bang, the founder of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), and the love triangle and betrayal among the two male actors who perform Xiang Yu and his concubine, and the wife of Xiang Yu’s actor against the background of the persecution of artists during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). *The Sent Down Girl* focuses on a later phase of the Cultural Revolution when city youths were sent down to work in the countryside. *Xiuxiu* is at first a naïve girl from Chengdu who embraced the movement of going to the countryside on the border with Tibet. Out of a wish to return to the city, *Xiuxiu* believes in several men’s promise to help her if she sleeps with them. As she gradually loses herself, Lao Jin, a Tibetan man, remains the faithful friend. This unit can focus on the self-reflexivity on the role of art in post-1949 China, and how political movements affect human relationships. Whereas the family in *To Live* is the basis for the survival of disasters, *Farewell* deals with a husband’s betrayal of his wife and his best friend, another actor, whose loyalty to him in a play they performed translates into their relationship in real life. While *Fugui*’s art becomes a political tool in the Great Leap Forward movement and eventually becomes an empty box during the Cultural Revolution, the Peking Opera singer Cheng Dieyi in *Farewell* resists art’s loss of autonomy and pays a dear price for that insistence. Part four and Part three of the film critique (Chou 50-256) give an excellent analysis of these respective themes. The dialogues in *To Live* are more teachable than those in *Farewell*. The selection of materials for language teaching purpose can consider these aspects. *Xiuxiu* can be introduced in two class meeting times by using the synopsis by Wei Wang (Chou 222-

224). A lecture can introduce the larger historical context and the subgenre of literature by a generation of the city youths who later returned to the city. Both subjects appear in Wei Wang's critique of the film (Chou 216-218).

⁹Rey Chow, "Not One Less: the Fable of a Migration" in Chris Berry, ed., *Chinese Films in Focus, 25 New Takes* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 167-174.

¹⁰Lin Haiyin, *Memories of Peking: South Side Stories*. Tr. Nancy C. Ing and Chi Pang-yuan (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002).