

Introducing the Guest-Edited Section

China through the Cinematic Lens

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With the global visibility of China as a rising power, Chinese cinema has also emerged and developed into a vibrant academic field in the West since the mid-1980s, as evinced by an increased number of scholarly publications, conferences, film festivals, and university courses on Chinese cinema. More students than ever are interested in studying Chinese cinema in academic classrooms, through which they fulfill common curriculum requirements and have the opportunity to learn about Chinese language, culture, and history. Many teachers find Chinese cinema courses helpful in making Chinese studies more visible both on campus and in the community. The advancement of digital technology has also not only facilitated the research and teaching of Chinese films, but it has also offered students the opportunity to actively contribute to developing cinematic images of China, as more students are now studying in China while equipped with digital devices.

The five essays in this special section introduce and reflect upon using Chinese film in different types of liberal arts courses, through experiences of faculty members who are also active scholars of Chinese culture and cinema. The objective of these essays is to offer perspectives on the history, philosophy, and pedagogy of teaching Chinese cinema, with a special focus on innovative ways of combining individual faculty training with students' creativity.

Dr. Haili Kong's state-of-the-field essay reviews the history and approaches to teaching Chinese cinema in United States classrooms within recent decades. Kong's essay

identifies existing pedagogical patterns, points out areas of Chinese cinema that remain to be included in current curricula, and further provides a list of selected bibliography and resources essential for a basic understanding of Chinese cinema.

Dr. Luying Chen presents pedagogical strategies for teaching Chinese films in advanced language classes. Chen reviews the approaches of two recently published textbooks, provides a case study of teaching Zhang Yimou's *To Live* through a combination of literature and film and using a comparative perspective, and outlines four topics that can be adopted to foster language proficiency and critical thinking in Chinese language courses.

Dr. Jin Feng discusses the role of Chinese film in cultural courses, particularly focusing on the steps for teaching China's Cultural Revolution through the use of Tian Zhuangzhuang's *Blue Kite*. Feng details her methods for training students to develop cultural empathy through a close examination of both the text and the film, and how to analyze film in historical context, in order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the film and the historical period it depicts.

Dr. John Crespi explores how guided and imaginative use of digital video and audio technology can help students engage thoughtfully with local cultures, and how to use these tools in order to foster a reconsideration of often deeply held dichotomies, such as tradition vs. modernity, past vs. present, and East vs. West. Crespi also discusses the selection of course materials and themes to lay groundwork for creating digital stories, and how to negate the problems of choosing a meaningful research topic for digital exploration, possible issues of media literacy, and the process of gathering and editing material on site.

My article focuses on the important role that popular music plays in Jia Zhangke's six films in general, and in his *Unknown Pleasures* in particular, with an aim to bridge the gap between Jia's increased use in the classroom and the lack of scholarly attention to his use of popular music. I argue that Jia uses music

to express his characters' anxiety during a time when China is drastically transformed into a globalized society. Music and noise are used collectively to reflect upon the violent nature of the processes of reinforcing a communal identity in socialist China and of decentralizing that shared identity in post-socialist China.

We hope that our experiences with teaching film courses, publishing scholarly work on Chinese cinema, and supervising students' video-related projects can benefit and empower other colleagues who would like to integrate visual materials into their classrooms and lesson plans in order to promote a better understanding of China.