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The Five C's: Bringing a 1980's Film into the 21st Century Chinese Language Learning Context

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Film has become an ever more effective medium of instruction in foreign languages, including Chinese. Developing good textbooks to accompany the films is too labor-intensive to keep pace with the growing production of contemporary films, so it is useful to develop strategies for using older films and existing textbooks. This paper examines how slight shifts in focus can overcome the issue of contemporaneity and bring out the qualities of an older film and accompanying textbook. The film *Under the Bridge* (Bai, 1984) serves as an example, and conscious attention to the Five C's of Foreign Language Education: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (National Standards, 2006) drawn up by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages serves as the method. The paper shows how shifting the focus from the script to the film, rather than diffusing the focus on language, can actually strengthen the language learning experience. It reviews some more recent film guide textbooks to demonstrate why it is still worthwhile to bring this older film and textbook into the twenty-first century.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching a foreign language through film is an effective way to introduce authentic language and to provide a step forward from the artificiality of textbook dialogues that are invented for the language learner. Learning through film engages the current visually and action-oriented generation of learners. For many undergraduate students, events of twenty years ago seem like ancient history; they expect film to represent what is happening right now. But preparing a film to become an effective teaching medium requires knowledge, experience, and a tremendous amount of time and painstaking work. Publishing the results takes still more time. The teacher's task thus necessarily includes teaching students to appreciate older films; in doing so, we help to broaden their temporal horizons as well as geographical and intellectual ones, all important parts of the liberal arts mission.

This paper focuses on a single course aimed at developing Chinese language proficiency through the study of film. The paper is divided into three parts. The first places the course in the context of our language program, explores some issues involved in choosing a film with accompanying textbook, and relates how the course was structured once the choice was made. The second part describes how serendipitous discovery of the “Five C’s” gave support to changes in approach to the course, with specific examples for each of the “C’s” and the students’ responses. Finally, by asking whether the same 1980’s film should be considered for future use, it considers other more current films and textbooks before drawing some conclusions.

CURRICULUM

Our course in Chinese through film was initiated in the early 1990’s by a colleague who specialized in film studies, and who chose her own films and prepared her own materials. The film course was very successful, and has remained so for a succession of colleagues who specialize in literature rather than film studies. It became one of four semester-long modules in our third- and fourth-year language curriculum, the others being social issues, newspaper reading, and literature.¹ As our program grew, we were able to establish a sequence, and film became the first course in our curriculum to focus on “authentic materials,” in the first semester of third-year study. At this juncture, films still offer the situational dialogues that are the focus of the first two years, but can lead to sustained narration and topics treated in more formal documents. Our four-year sequence now forms the core of our Chinese major, set in the larger context of a four-year liberal arts education.

Selecting a textbook and film

By the time it fell to me to teach the course in 2001, half a dozen textbook guides for studying Chinese through film had appeared.² In selecting among them, I paid most attention to the language used in the film. I decided that it should be in modern

¹ The idea of “modules” was suggested by Vivian Ling (1994, p. 7). The organization of upper-level courses into modules saved us from teaching them as “independent study.” Since those who began as “true beginners” rarely can learn Chinese independently by the third year, “independent study” becomes simply an administrative category for low-enrollment courses that carry no teaching credit for the instructor.

² These include Ma Jing Heng’s *At Middle Age* (1988, 1991) and *Strange Friends* (1989), both based on 1982 films; *The True Story of Ah Q* (1992), for the 1981 film, and *A Great Wall* (1993), for the 1986 film; Vivian Ling’s *The Girl in Red* (1994), and *Under the Bridge* (1994), both based on 1984 films; Chao Der-lin’s guide for *To Live* (1996) based on the 1994 film and Laifong Leung’s guide for *Early Spring in February*, (1998) based on a 1963 film were not widely available. Leung’s work was republished in 2004. Pilwun Shih Wang and Sarah Wang’s *Early One Spring: An Intermediate Chinese Reader to Accompany the Film Video February* (2003) is based on the same 1963 film.

standard Chinese with a minimum of, if any, regional dialects; it should not use many technical words, whether they refer to machinery or medicine or media, etc. Furthermore, the subject matter should have some relevance to the students' lives, so that whether the films had historical significance or were based on the literary canon was less important than that the situations in the film should be realistic, natural, and reveal something about Chinese society and behavior without being overtly and overly didactic. It should have an emotional pull and a strong narrative drive that moves the story forward from episode to episode joining together its diverse situations and disparate parts and sustaining interest when the film is divided and presented in serialized installments.

Under the Bridge (Bai, 1984) fulfilled all of these conditions.³ It is set in Shanghai, but all of the characters speak modern standard Chinese rather than Shanghai dialect—this sacrifice of verisimilitude was worthwhile for a language class. The story takes place just after the Cultural Revolution, and captures Chinese society in an interesting moment of economic and political flux. It contains enough suspense to sustain interest, but not so much as to tempt students to speed toward or skip to the ending. It offers a variety of situations and emotions, uses vocabulary from a number of disciplines, and contains instances of formal as well as informal languages. Its narrative drive is strong enough to carry the story even when the film is divided into segments and viewed over the course of the many weeks of a semester. It features an attractive cast who speak clear, standard Mandarin.

The textbook accompanying the film, *Under the Bridge: A Study Guide for the Film* by Vivian Ling (1994b) also proved to be exceptionally well designed. Comprised of two parts, “Part I: Script and Vocabulary Annotations,” and “Part II: Grammatical Notes and Exercises,” it is printed in both traditional and simplified characters. Having the script in hand helps students to get into the language of the film. The script is divided into twelve segments; each composed of a sequence of clearly delineated scenes from the movie; narratives in English bridge the rapidly shifting scenes, a helpful device at a time when film segments were not readily available for students to review individually. The film and textbook fit neatly into a fifteen-week semester-long course while allowing some leeway for review and for additional materials.

The textbook's vocabulary lists are also exceptionally well thought out. Vocabulary notes necessarily occupy a larger part of Chinese textbooks than they do with alphabetical and cognate languages, such as Italian, German, or French (See Borra & Pausini, 2004; Borra & Mader-Koltay, 2007; Conditt, 2007). They serve a more essential function, as the thousands of Chinese characters must be learned individually, complicating dictionary use and constituting a major challenge for learners (Moser, 1991). Moreover, the characters are evenly spaced, with no extra spacing or other

³ Written and directed by Bai Chen 白沉 (1922-2002), the film *Dàqiáo xiàmiàn* 大橋下面 won first prize from the Ministry of Culture. <http://baike.baidu.com/view/313742.htm>. Accessed August 12, 2011. The lead-actress won one of the highest awards for Chinese film, the Golden Rooster Award.

devices to mark boundaries between words, which commonly consist of two or more characters. The well-made vocabulary list thus not only gives the right choice among definitions, but helps to navigate the text. Ling's textbook surpasses other Chinese textbooks, which all give *Pīnyīn* Romanization and English renderings, by dividing the vocabulary words into three levels of importance, determined mainly by frequency of usage. It gives two vocabulary indices for words of primary and secondary importance: one is arranged by the total number of pen strokes used in writing each character, the other is arranged alphabetically by *Pīnyīn* Romanization.

The same textbook's grammatical explanations are clear and easy to understand. There is no single standard for descriptions of Chinese grammar, not even for the names of the parts of speech. Ling's (1994b) textbook conforms to the system of analysis used in our earlier textbooks, saving us time from learning new terminology and new categories of grammatical analyses. The explanations are accompanied by plentiful examples and exercises. Questions following each segment in Part I help to reinforce the grammar points as well as test comprehension.

Course organization

Having adopted this film and Ling's (1994b) textbook I outlined the course. The class met four days a week for 50-minute periods. I planned to follow Ling's lessons three days a week, requiring the students to learn the vocabulary and structures as presented in the textbook, and to discuss the film using prescribed vocabulary and structures. I digitized the VHS into twelve segments following Ling's divisions, and made them available in our media center. Later, as our technological capabilities expanded, the digitized versions were accessible to students from our on-line course delivery system for home viewing. Tests and examinations were based on this material. For the fourth class hour each week, we would view and discuss other films that colleagues across the United States were generous in recommending. Discussions of these supplemental films centered on the students' responses to characters, action, and themes, and took place in a freer, less prescribed manner than was the case with our textbook film. Following the discussions, students were to write essays on any aspect of their responses (In Chinese "*guānhòugǎn*," 观后感 "reflections after viewing" is a common essay topic); they could resubmit as many times as they wished after receiving corrections; their final drafts were due in a portfolio at the end of the semester.

Course evaluation

In all, I taught the course three times, in 2001, 2007, and 2008, with *Under the Bridge* (Ling, 1994b) as the central text. In the 2001 end-of-term student evaluations, which at my institution students write entirely in narrative form, there was just one complaint: three out of seven student evaluations declared the film "too old," and worth studying only because of the study guide textbook. In 2007 there were no such complaints, and

in 2008, although the film was seven years older, only one out of twelve student evaluation responses commented on the film's age. What happened in the meantime? Differences among individual students, group dynamics and "chemistry" of course played a role, as did the choice of supplemental films. But I believe that the differing responses were due in large part to adjustments in approach.

THE FIVE C's

The changes in approach resulted from my conscious attention to the Five C's of Foreign Language Education: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (National Standards, 2006), which I had learned about at an ACTFL conference, and which offered a reasoned framework for incorporating broader considerations with linguistic and language-pedagogical questions. In ACTFL's publication *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2006), the "Five C's" are described slightly differently for the different languages. The Chinese version was drawn up by a large team of some of the best-known teachers in the field, including college-level teachers. Although their focus is on Chinese language study in grades K-12, the general questions and approaches are equally relevant at the college level. While I did not systematically adopt these organizing principles and standards, keeping them in mind brought subtle changes to my course. Whereas the earlier iteration of my course had focused mainly on the script and grammar, with the film serving almost as a background, the "Five C's" approach helped bring the film to the foreground.

The Film

Under the Bridge (Bai, 1984) centers on a love story between Qin Nan and Gao Zhihua, neighbors in a maze of narrow alleyways under the large bridge of the title. Qin is a tailor-seamstress and lives with her father; and Gao fixes bikes and lives with his mother. It is after the Cultural Revolution, when Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening" policies have just begun to permit private enterprise to co-exist with a fully state-planned and state-run economy. When an official tries to confiscate Qin's license because her sewing stand is blocking traffic, Gao rescues her and invites her to set up across the street in front of his house, where they work side by side. Later, their mutual friend Xiao Jian gets caught in a scheme refurbishing downscale bikes into name-brand ones, and is sent away to a reform farm. He writes to Gao, who had warned him against the scheme; Gao is so angry that he crumples up the letter before finishing it and throws it down. Qin picks it up, reads it, discovers that Xiao Jian has a sister, and goes to visit her, saying that Gao had sent her. Xiao Jian's sister Xiao Yun is a foil for Qin Nan. Qin Nan, quiet and reserved, has a deep well of sadness. We learn through another character that her mother had committed suicide and her father had gone mad during the Cultural Revolution. But Xiao Yun, who has also lost both parents and moreover is crippled by childhood polio, is bright and cheerful. Qin Nan learns from

her example to be brave and to reveal her secret. Her frequent trips out of town had already set the neighbors gossiping. Now, inspired by Xiao Yun's courage in the face of adversity, she resolves to brave gossip and bring her child Dongdong back to the city from the farm where he had been staying with her aunt and uncle. Her father is delighted to welcome the child, but the neighbors are not so kind. For this paper I will just focus on the film to this point, and on these aspects of the story.

Under the Bridge offered fertile resources for considering the "Five C's." At the same time the "Five C's" brought out rich facets of the film that had not been highlighted with the script and grammar approach.

Communication

The first "C" in the ACTFL guidelines is "Communication." Communication within the film takes place on different levels, both in speech and in writing. Qin Nan's father is a school teacher; aside from using more bookish vocabulary, he says things like "The power of old customs in society is still very great." The tone of his speech is reinforced in the film by the grave, reserved, and dignified demeanor of the actor. Gao Zhihua's mother is a factory worker; she uses simpler vocabulary and has more home-related concerns. In urging her son to find a wife, she recites a little ditty (here very loosely translated): "It's more than thirty years since you were born; who will mend your trousers when they're torn?" It reveals her age, gender, and status in ways that can be seen without discussion. Gao Zhihua and Qin Nan speak to each other in what we have learned as standard Chinese, in clear contrast with the banter Gao uses with his friend Xiao Jian, who says things like "Hey, lend a fire," to light his cigarette, or "Be there or be square" when asking Gao to meet him somewhere. Xiao Jian's casual language is fortified by his casual behavior, jumping up to sit on a cart, snatching a cigarette from Gao's mouth, running across the street to speak to Qin Nan, etc. He seems like a carefree scamp. Yet in his letter to Gao, Xiao Jian uses a much more formal style, known as "*Shūmiànyǔ*" 书面语 or "book-face-style." The formal written style differs from spoken Chinese in vocabulary as well as sentence structure. Aiming for comprehension, we "translate" the formal written style into colloquial Chinese, splitting long sentences with many dependent clauses into shorter sentences with more staccato rhythms. At the third-year level we do not expect the students to acquire elegant written styles, but the "translation" exercises call their attention to the differences between oral communication and written communication.

But equally important as the speech acts, spoken or written, the film conveys non-verbal communication through situations and "body language." For example, to express affection, the characters do not embrace, but rather offer food, or advice, or a sweat rag to share. Asking students to interpret these scenes did not require complex vocabulary or structures. "What does Aunt Yu give Gao?" "A bowl of wonton." "Why?" "Because he fixed her machine." "Does he eat right away?" "No, he's not hungry." "Why does he sit down and eat, then?" "Because Aunt Yu says she'll be angry if he doesn't."

“Would she really be angry?” “No, she’s just saying so.” “Why?” “Because it’s her way to say ‘thanks;’” after more prompting: “to refuse the food would be to refuse the thanks.” This short exchange led students to notice other examples of unspoken communication, so that instead of saying “Eeww” as previous students had when Gao offers Qin a sweat rag, they remarked, “Ah, he likes her!” Students are thus engaged also in communication with the film and with each other. Set in the context of “Communication,” discussions of these aspects in simple language no longer seem like frivolous departures from the more difficult textual passages and grammar practice.

Of the three “Communicative Modes,” Interpersonal, Interpretative, and Presentational (National Standards, 2006, 36-37), our classroom discussions naturally encompassed the first two. As for the third, although sustained narration was a goal, I did not assign oral presentations, in large part due to the nature of the Chinese language. Chinese is a tonal language, where a syllable spoken in different inflections may carry different meanings. In discussions, by repeating the student’s observation, the teacher can correct the tones and word choice and lead the discussion forward; in an oral narration, even if the text is corrected in advance, tonal errors can make the presentation incomprehensible. Thus for our class the “presentational” mode of communication took the form of essays written in informal style.

Culture

Communication inevitably overlaps with the second C, “Culture.” Many textbooks that aim to introduce Chinese culture will have chapters on history and politics (dynastic and revolutionary), geography (rivers, mountains, provinces, cities, country), social organization (marriage, family, neighborhoods and neighborhood committees), inventions (gunpowder, compass, printing), festivals (New Year’s, Dragon Boat, Mid-Autumn), and products in art and literature. But the “culture” to which the *Standards* (2006) refer also includes social conventions and behavior.

Supporting this anthropological definition of culture, in *Under the Bridge* (Bai, 1984), we see the characters in many situations and activities of daily life: buying, preparing and eating food, washing and sewing, walking, biking, resting, sleeping, etc. We see the plain, dark interiors of the houses, and Qin Nan and Gao Zhihua working in the street outside. We see rural life through Qin Nan’s visits to Dongdong. The many physical and cultural differences are so naturally integrated in the movie that they are quickly absorbed and accepted. Whether by pausing the film in class or assigning segments to view after class, asking students to describe the scenes helps them to notice differences and similarities, and to review and to use basic vocabulary and structures. We also see interactions between parents and children, friends and neighbors, citizens and officials, customers and service providers, patients and doctors. Here the language and concepts involved are sometimes more complex.

The cultural concept that most captured our attention is the notion of privacy. We discussed it in the contexts of our focus film, and two supplemental films, one

representing an American view and the other a Chinese view. We also examined the translation of the term in Chinese and English.

In *Under the Bridge*, when Qin Nan picked up and read the letter meant for Gao, none of the students thought to question it. But a few simple questions raised the issue: “How did Qin Nan know that Xiao Jian had a younger sister?” “She read it in Gao’s letter.” “Did Gao ask her to read the letter?” “No, he threw it down.” “Do you (Would you—there is no subjunctive in Chinese) read a letter someone wrote to your friend?” “No.” At this point, knowing that their range of vocabulary would limit further discussion, I suggest returning to the question after we see that week’s supplemental movie, *A Great Wall* (Wang, 1986).⁴

The meaning of “privacy” is openly confronted in *A Great Wall* as it explores cultural differences, understanding and misunderstanding between two families. A Chinese-American father, born in China, returns to visit his sister and her family after some thirty years away; his Chinese-American wife and college-age son speak no Chinese; his sister and her husband speak no English, but their daughter is studying English to prepare for her college entrance examinations. In one scene, the American cousin, shocked to discover that his aunt opens and reads her daughter’s letters, teaches his Chinese cousin the notion of privacy. “Privacy,” she tastes the word in English. Later, when the mother again opens a letter addressed to her daughter, the daughter objects: “It’s not good to open other people’s letters.” The mother retorts “Other people! You are not ‘other people!’ You are my daughter!” She asks her daughter what evil deed she must have committed to want to hide it from her mother. The daughter says in Chinese: “I wasn’t hiding anything” and adds “*Privacy*.” Mother: “Huh? What?” Daughter: “*Privacy* is just *privacy*. Uncle says it can’t be translated.” The mother laments that her daughter is using foreign words to trick her. The conflicting notions of privacy between the two cultures could not have been made plainer.⁵

Like the mother in *A Great Wall*, Qin Nan in *Under the Bridge* is portrayed as a virtuous person who would not break cultural taboos. The privacy of personal letters obviously did not occur to her when she picked up Xiao Jian’s letter to Gao Zhihua and read it. Later, she gives Gao her diary to read. Less innocent breaches of privacy are reflected in the neighbors’ constant gossip. Why does Qin Nan go away so often? Where does she go? When was she married? Who is her child’s father? When Gao wonders why Qin Nan does not smile, it is a neighbor who tells him Qin’s family history. When Dongdong has a fight with the neighborhood bully, a crowd of adults suddenly gathers, loudly offering opinion and advice. There seems to be no line between what is public and what is private.

⁴ Entitled *Běijīng Gùshi* 北京故事 “Beijing Story” in Chinese, *A Great Wall* was the first American movie made in China, written by Peter Wang and Shirley Sun, and directed by Peter Wang.

⁵ These scenes were among the “encounters of cultures” pointed out by the *New York Times* reviewer Walter Goodman (1986, May 30). Last accessed August 21, 2001.

The question of privacy as a cultural notion came up again a few weeks later with another of our supplemental films, *Shower* (*xǐzǎo* 洗澡). Focused on the old communal bath houses of Beijing, the film essentially is an elegy for the old sense of belonging in the old alleyway neighborhoods now being razed and replaced by high rises. The films show residents in the high rises locking their doors and feeling displaced and lonely, while those in the one-story alleyway houses greet and visit each other, and practice what in another context might appear as busybody meddling. But rather than gossip and intrusiveness, the film presents these human relations in the positive light of compassion, neighborliness, and sense of community.

This time our discussion of privacy was initiated by a student. Wishing to discuss the lack of privacy in communal bathing, the student had found the word in an English-Chinese dictionary translated as “*yǐnsī*” 隐私. In Chinese new words are formed by using existing characters, and the existing meanings of the characters often shade the meaning of the new word.⁶ The two characters that make up the word “*yǐnsī*” 隐私 separately mean “hidden, secret” and “private, egoistic.” Here I needed only to ask “Isn’t the “*sī*” 私 in “*yǐnsī*” the same “*sī*” as that in “*zìsī*” 自私? “*Zìsī*” is a word the students had learned earlier, meaning “selfish.” Had I reminded students to check back in a Chinese-English dictionary words that they had found in an English-Chinese dictionary, they would have found for “*yǐnsī*” 隐私, one’s secrets, private matters one wants to hide.” This definition would have reinforced the mother’s suspicions. But even despite my neglect, students realized that a girl wishing that her mother would respect her privacy by not reading her letters would hardly use the word “*yǐnsī*.” Thus while we began by discussing cultural differences, the topic came back to language, raising awareness of how words are constructed, and reminding us of how little the words’ spheres of meaning overlap across languages.

Connections

These ways of making connections with other films helped to inform and to enrich our understanding of our focus film. “Connections” is the “third C.” But in the *Standards* “Connections,” actually refers to connecting with other disciplines. Most of the students had taken at least one course on China, and knew something about the Cultural Revolution and the Reform and Opening movement that followed. This

⁶ “*Yǐnsī*” 隐私 is glossed in *A Chinese-English Dictionary* (1990) as: “one’s secrets, private matters one wants to hide.” *The ABC Chinese-English Dictionary* (1996) gives “personal secrets, privacy.” *A Modern Chinese English Dictionary* (2001), adds to “one’s secrets, private matters one wants to hide” “*yǐnsīquán* 隐私权: the right to privacy.” That the word is a neologism is strongly suggested by its absence in earlier dictionaries. Google’s NGram shows it coming into usage after 1990, and becoming common only in the current century.

(http://ngrams.googlelabs.com/graph?content=%E9%9A%90%E7%A7%81&year_start=1945&year_end=2008&corpus=11&smoothing=3) last accessed August 10, 2011.

background knowledge helped them to better understand *Under the Bridge*, at the same time that the film gave them a more intimate understanding of how people were personally affected by the political movements. Our students of economics gained insight into the transition from the state-planned economic system to an entrepreneurial one, and we all learned more about the counterfeit name-brand or “fake products” issue that has been so prominent in Chinese trade. These subjects were brought up by the students themselves both in our conversation sessions and in their essays. In learning the vocabulary for state-owned enterprises and entrepreneurs, they expressed surprise that in the movie employment in the former not only offered job security but carried much more prestige, while the latter were regarded as failures, and poor marriage prospects. Knowing that the balance had shifted very quickly in favor of entrepreneurs, they nevertheless reported that they had used this film and some of our supplemental films in papers for their Chinese history class.

Connecting in this way to other courses is of course a primary goal of liberal arts education. In our language class, it also helped to shift the focus away from memorizing vocabulary lists and sentence patterns toward more efforts at communication. Unfortunately the communication often devolved into English or ungrammatical Chinese; that is something we need to improve upon.

Comparisons

Closely overlapping with “Culture” and “Connections,” the fourth “C” of the *Standards*, “Comparisons,” refers to developing insight into one’s own language and culture through exposure to others. Our discussion of the notion of privacy had naturally led to reflections on and comparisons with the students’ own cultural expectations. The “fourth C” is built into the core curriculum at my institution, where every student is required to take a course on Western traditions and one on another culture—one that we carefully avoid calling “non-Western” and “other”—but nevertheless invites comparisons and contrasts. By the third year, students are sensitive to cross-cultural issues and tendencies to “essentialize” or stereotype other cultures. They are alive to the difficulties and dangers of generalizing about culture, whether our own or others’. Thus in our class we could focus on the language aspect of comparisons.

While our discussion of “privacy” centered on an English word, another comparison centered on the film’s use of the Chinese word “*cánfèi*” 殘廢. “*Cánfèi*” is made up of the characters for “injured” and “waste,” to mean “crippled, maimed,” or “cripple.” Qin Nan mouths the word when she first meets Xiao Yun. The students could not bring themselves to call anyone a “cripple,” and translated “*cánfèi*” into “handicapped person.” But translating “handicapped person” back into Chinese gives “*cánjīrén*,” 殘疾人 “injured + illness + person,” which comes closer to the gentler “handicapped person.” This example not only brings up questions of translation, but

could have led to a full discussion of “political correctness” and euphemisms. We did not pursue that discussion, not least because our vocabulary and time constraints would have permitted only the shallowest generalizations about China’s recent political history, political control and censorship. What students realized without belaboring the point was that Qin Nan was not being rude when she mouthed “*cánfèi*” upon seeing Xiao Yun.

A third example is reticence. Qin’s reticence toward Gao and her neighbors is easy to understand: she has a secret to hide. But she is equally reticent toward her father, who knows the truth about her past. She explains her refusal to answer her father’s questions about her future plans by saying that she does not want to worry him at his age. When she decides to bring Dongdong back to the city with her, her aunt and uncle worry what the neighbors will say. Qin says only “I met a girl, she’s a cripple...I can’t go on like this.” Here she allows her actions to demonstrate more clearly than fine speeches the lesson in courage that she had learned from Xiao Yun. The scholar Tang Yanfang (2006) has proposed that preference for action over utterance is a cultural trait with basis in both Taoism and Confucianism.⁷ Whether or not one is convinced by Tang’s statement, one finds many examples of ellipses, as speakers deemed reticence more appropriate to the situation. Thus when Gao first sees Dongdong at Qin’s side, he does not ask “Whose child is this?” “How did this child come to be here?” He says only “This child...” At the end of the movie Qin and Gao are obviously in love. Sitting across the table from one another, she muses, “Odd, how is it that I’ve told you everything?” He says, “I understand.” She: “What do you understand?” He: “Anyway, I understand.” Throughout the movie, the word “love” had never been uttered. The characters had never embraced.

For the ending, Ling writes in English: “At a loss for words, Qin Nan and Zhihua look deeply into each other’s eyes.” Year after year students groaned at this, and I assumed it was because they were dissatisfied at not seeing Gao and Qin in a passionate embrace at the end. In 2008, after having seen the segments in tiny Quicktime videos on computers and in VHS or DVD projected on a large classroom screen, the students asked to see the movie from beginning to end at my house. Gathered around my little 32-inch television, they smiled through some familiar scenes, sighed through others; I rushed back to the room when they suddenly erupted in cheers. As the credits rolled, we saw together a scene that had been omitted from the textbook and from my digitized segments, one that I had not noticed. There, in a crowded Shanghai street, we could barely detect Gao Zhihua and Qin Nan; side by side, still not touching, walking a bicycle—it is the special bike that he had built for Xiao Yun—and Dongdong is sitting on the handlebars. I asked students why they found this scene so much more satisfying than Ling’s ending narrative. They said “Because the family is together.” I asked if they

⁷ Tang, Yanfang (2006) cites both Confucian and Taoist sources for the preference of action over words. The Taoist distrust of words is well known. Confucius is also known for his insistence on using the correct word in the correct time and place, but Tang finds passages where he expresses preference for action over words.

wouldn't have liked to see Qin and Gao embrace. "Oh no, we would not want a Hollywood-style ending!" They went on to tell me that many things in their own lives did not have to be verbalized or demonstrated, thus correcting my own stereotyping assumptions about young Americans.

Communities

More difficult to achieve for my class, ACTFL's fifth "C", "Communities," refers to "participating in multilingual communities at home and around the world," particularly beyond the school setting. My institution is geographically isolated from Chinese-speaking communities. While some students reported satisfaction at speaking Chinese in restaurants and shops while on vacation, sending the entire class out to use the language beyond the school setting surely would put an unfair burden on the one Chinese couple who run our one local Chinese fast-food restaurant. To pursue this "C" in a meaningful way, we must rely on study- abroad programs. Six of the students from the 2008 class joined me in spring 2009 on a semester-long study program in China. Others studied abroad in the summer, and still others have written to me about Chinese speakers they have found near their homes or their place of work. Although this cannot be attributed to attention to the "Five C's" in my course, these experiences do fit nicely into the fifth "C."

CONSIDERATIONS

Retrospective

Looking back, the changes that occurred in the course were not all due to the "Five C's." Rather, some of the other changes in the course enabled and facilitated considerations of the "Five C's." At first, we focused mainly on the textbook: there is plenty of vocabulary, new structures, and exercises to fully occupy the three class sessions per week, requiring about two hours of homework for each session. The supplemental movies served as shared enjoyment and relaxation. In the second iteration of the course, I reduced the number of assigned exercises and gave fewer tests on vocabulary and structures, in part from self-defense at the doubled enrollment; even after going over exercises in class, correcting them required hours of tedious work after class. Another change was due to technological advances: instead of requiring students to go to the language laboratory to view the film, I could make the segments available through our on-line course delivery system. This helped shift our classroom discussions more toward seeing, and less toward reading, thus helping to loosen the students' grip on their textbooks and flashcards as they went beyond memorizing vocabulary and sentences. This in turn allowed our discussions to include broader cultural matters, for which the "Five C's" gave a framework. That framework forced me to choose

supplemental films more carefully, and to increase the number of essay assignments, so the students had more chances to communicate their cultural observations, comparisons, and connections.

Prospective

Looking forward, one might ask: should this film be brought into the second decade of the twenty-first century? Surely there are more contemporary works with similar textbooks? The Chinese movie industry produced 526 movies in 2010 alone. (Moxley, 2011). In January 2011 World Publication Corporation announced publication of fourteen textbooks for “foreigners” with DVDs of various types of movies from the PRC and Hong Kong.⁸ In March 2011 China Film Group Corporation and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press Co., Ltd. announced even bigger plans with a joint project to produce multi-media teaching materials for “foreigners” based on 100 Chinese films.⁹ Since “foreigners” (*duì wài* 对外 “toward outside”) include Japanese and Koreans who already know characters and learn Chinese in large numbers, the usefulness of these textbooks remains to be seen. There are also websites that promise subscribers lessons in Chinese through various movies.¹⁰

Currently there are three film textbooks with accompanying films available, published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press in their “Watching the Movie and Learning Chinese” series: *Shower* (*xǐzǎo* 洗澡 “to take a bath”) (Zhang & Chen, 2010), *Farewell My Concubine* (*Bà wáng bié jī* 霸王别姬 “the hegemon takes leave of his concubine”) (Wang & Yu, 2009), and *Flowers in the Clouds* (*nǚréndetiānkōng* 女人的天空 “women’s skies”) (Ding, Zhang, & Liu, 2010).¹¹ Intended for self-study as well as classroom use, each offers selected scenes with vocabulary notes, grammar points, and exercises, ending with the full dialogue script with annotations, and answer keys to the exercises. Having already seen the first two movies with students, who found *Shower* alienating for its male nudity and community bathhouses, and *Farewell My Concubine* (Chen, 1993) overly complex both in its language and its references, I examined the materials for the third. *Flowers in the Clouds* (Wu, 2003) is a comedy about women training to be flight attendants, with a focus on three in particular and their relationships

⁸ Kàn diànyǐng xué Hànyǔ. <http://www.studychineseculture.com/cn/book.asp?id=5093>. Last accessed Aug. 11, 2011.

⁹ Li Zhenyu. <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/22219/14212592.html>. Article dated March 23, 2011. Last accessed Aug. 11, 2011.

¹⁰ For example <http://www.learn-chinese-from-movies.com/> offers subscribers the opportunity to “learn to read and use over 3000 of the most commonly used Chinese characters “passively” by watching ten (10) of the greatest Chinese movies ever made with unique self-teaching subtitles.” Last accessed Aug. 12, 2011.

¹¹ See <http://blcup.com/>. *Shower* 洗澡 (2008, film 1999), *Farewell My Concubine* 霸王别姬 (2009, film 1993), and *Flowers in the Clouds* 女人的天空 (2010, film 2003). Last accessed August 18, 2011.

with husbands, sons, boyfriends, and each other. The setting is clean, modern, and urban; the actors are attractive and enunciate clearly in standard Chinese; their speech is contemporary, sometimes even “hip.”

Seriously considering the textbook and film, however, brought up several issues. According to the blurb on the back cover (Ding, Zhang, & Liu, 2010), it “is best suited to learners of Chinese with a vocabulary of 3000 words;” that is far beyond the level reached by American students in third-year Chinese. The vocabulary and structural notes can be puzzling. For example, the keyword for flight attendant (空乘) is marked *kōngchéng*, while the actors all say *kōngchèng*; the word *zǐhóngsè* 紫红色 (purple-red-color) is glossed “amaranth, fuchsia;” the expression *jiūchánbùxiū* 纠缠不休 (to pester endlessly) is annotated “to stick like a limpet.” In “Notes on Language Points,” the first one reads: “‘*shuàidāile*’ 帅呆了 is a catchword which refers to a very handsome man,” without noting that it is slang, and how and when it can be used. Thus the teacher who adopts this text has to be an intermediary in English as well as in Chinese, and supply endless amounts of supplements. It seems far more practical to seek a textbook intended specifically for American students.

Of film-based textbooks prepared for American students, the most recent is *Readings in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* by Chou, Wang, and Chiang, published in 2007. It offers excerpts from the dialogues of ten films from Taiwan and the PRC, dating from 1983 to 2000, each prefaced by a story synopsis and critique focusing on one or two cultural or moral points. Intended for the fourth-year level, the balance between essays and excerpts makes it primarily a reader about the movies, reflecting the points of view and prose styles of language-teaching authors, rather “authentic” material written for native-speaking readers. If one neglects the essays to focus solely on the film dialogues, then this book differs little from earlier textbooks, except in offering ten excerpts rather than one complete film. Chou et al (2007) argue that studying one movie over several weeks “can become either repetitious or uninteresting to both students and teachers” and “not every part of the movie may be substantial enough for sustained discussion and language study.” (p. vii). But a well-chosen movie can be divided into installments, and it is not necessary to give the same attention to every part of a movie.

Focusing on a single film over many weeks actually can offer some advantages. It provides more consistent contexts for understanding the “intentions, assumptions, and presuppositions of speakers and hearers” (Kramersch, 1993, p. 36). Following the actions of the same human characters week after week allows the student to become more deeply involved in their lives. Seeing the same character use different types of language in different situations makes students more aware of different language “registers,” and helps them to “know how, when, and why to say what to whom.” (National Standards, 2006, p. 11). Finally, focusing on a single film allows both teacher and student the time to view it again and again. It is in these repeated viewings that small but telling details and cultural traits tend to emerge. In reviewing the film many times to write this paper, I have begun to notice camera angles, light and dark, background sounds and scenes that

help to direct the viewer's mood and response. Having previously focused on communication among the characters in the film, and how the story in the film communicates to the viewer, I have only recently begun to notice how the film itself, through the director and cinematographer, communicates with the viewer. The "Five C's" will allow these observations to strengthen any future iterations of the course.

For the single film, Ling's textbook has yet to be surpassed. Although *Under the Bridge* is inexorably becoming dated, Ling had noted that its "human interest" and "cinematic artistry" "promise...long-lasting value" (Ling, 1994b, p. v). The promise of long-lasting value seemed fulfilled when the film was revived for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, declared a classic (*jīngdiǎn* 经典), and reissued on DVD as well as streamed on-line. On-line reviewers have written that they could see it "a hundred times" without getting tired of it (*bǎikànbùyàn* 百看不厌).¹² If Ling's textbook could be updated, or if it can serve as a model for a future textbook based on a more current movie, some amendments can be made. Some of the notes in English stitching together the scenes effectively serve as "spoilers," and can be reduced. Now that technological advances have enabled students to view film segments independently and repeatedly, more questions can be addressed to visuals from the movie. The questions and exercises can be expanded to consider more cultural and comparative questions. Notes on usage can be expanded to give the linguistic and social knowledge to help user "know how, when, and why to say what to whom." (National Standards, 2006, p. 11).

Final reflections

Going beyond this movie, this book, and this language, there are aspects in the transformation of this course that can be shared with teachers of other languages. As we communicated every cultural response or comparison, we were articulating in language. When, rather than focus on a particular word or sentence structure, we focused on knowledge, an idea, or a concept, we again articulated in language. In the process of incorporating the "Five C's," without abandoning the focus on language, we expanded the language course from a "skills" course toward a "content" course, inviting the students to make connections across disciplines, thus fulfilling the broader mission of the Liberal Arts.

¹² *Wǒ jīntiān* ... <http://tieba.baidu.com/?kz=344594285>. Last accessed Aug. 18, 2011.

CONCLUSION

This paper introduced a college third-year language course, Chinese through Film, and its evolution from a vocabulary and grammar-based course to one that considered the broader framework of the “Five C’s of Foreign Language Instruction.” It described why the film and textbook for the *Under the Bridge* (Bai, 1984) were selected, and how the course was organized to focus on this film, along with a handful of supplemental films. The main part of the paper treats each of the “Five C’s” in turn. Examining the first “C,” “Communications,” through the speech acts, both spoken and written, in the film highlighted differences in informal and formal registers; considering non-verbal communication in the film helped us see differences in culture, the second “C.” Taking “culture” less in the sense of “products of civilization” and more in the anthropological sense of everyday life and concepts, this paper described discussions of the notion of “privacy” as manifested in this film and two others, and how questions from the instructor eventually led to student-initiated discussion. The fourth “C,” “Comparisons,” was approached through discussions of the acceptability of the word “cripple” in the film and in the students’ culture, and through discussions of reticence—where the Chinese consider it inappropriate or unnecessary to speak, as compared with our own expectations. The third and fifth “C’s,” “Connections” and “Communities,” were set in the larger context of a liberal arts education. The final part of the paper briefly reviewed some more recent textbooks that accompany films and are designed for learners of Chinese. Although more suitable textbooks for developing Chinese proficiency through studying films have yet to appear, some lessons learned with the “Five C’s” approach are relevant to any material. Focusing on specific cultural concepts seems to have helped defuse the demand for contemporaneity voiced by students in 2001, which were not echoed in later iterations of the course. Experience showed that broadening the language course beyond vocabulary and grammar exercises actually led students to engage more with the target language. It also showed that engagement with the “Five C’s” constantly returned the focus to language.

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