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Global film and journalism pedagogy

Journalism education is a field of well-documented controversy. As Deuze (2006) observes, the binary nature of journalism education, split between “practical,” skills-based training and “contextual” instruction, is still too heavily weighted on the side of the former. Some educators emphasize context as a concern of paramount importance to journalists and those who train them. Allen (1987) proposes the addition of another “W,” whence, to the traditional five already associated with competent journalism. This addition recognizes “that each seemingly separate story belongs within the context of even larger stories;” and promotes “a more holistic perspective” for journalistic reporting (Allen, 1987, 21). Furthermore, Deuze, Quandt, and Wahl-Jorgensen (2006) offer that the “theoretical problem of the role and function of journalism in society does not even begin to address the complexities involved when studying, analyzing and theorizing journalism, especially if we consider the sweeping trends of commercialization, digitization, globalization (and localization), all of which have profound implications for the profession” (334). This is especially so as national boundaries and the media that operate within them collide and coalesce to an increasing degree, making the education of competent journalists an enterprise of truly global proportions.

One way of approaching such a contextual, global training for journalists is to (re) emphasize the importance of cultural texts produced under the auspices of particular national media industries. Often, situations which may seem from the outside to be easily explained are in fact much more complicated by historical, cultural, and social issues. Many of these issues, due to sensitivity or the simple recession into the collective unconscious, may be spoken only in popular forms ostensibly dealing with other issues. Such forms, including musical productions, television, and film, become increasingly pertinent as boundaries become more and more permeable and far-flung cultural contexts become the “beat” of journalists everywhere.

Film, in particular, is a medium with powerful pedagogical possibilities, both for journalists training in universities as well as those with years of professional experience. Commentators have for some time understood the potential for linking the study of literature with the training of journalistic practice (Parisi, 1992; Good, 1985). This paper proposes that film is equally capable of promoting empathy and critical thinking skills. The Global Film Initiative (GFI), based in the United States, is an example of a fledgling attempt to incorporate film products of the non-Western world into the educational matrices of Western students. In its mission statement, the GFI points out that “in recent times, no medium has been as effective at communicating the range and diversity of the world’s cultures as the cinematic arts,” and that sensitivity to such diversity is key to the functionality of public sphere imagined on a global level.¹ Shoemaker (1993) posits critical thinking as a key component of journalism education, and, referencing Paul (1990), points out that “a critical thinker ‘is someone who is able to think well and fairly not just about her own beliefs and viewpoints, but about beliefs and viewpoints that are diametrically opposed to her own.’ And not just to think about them, but to explore and appreciate their adequacy, their cohesion, their very reasonableness vis-à-vis her own” (100). Engagement with cinematic texts is not only about providing information but also about providing just this kind of sympathy with a foreign

¹ More information on the Global Film Initiative can be found at www.globalfilm.org ..

viewpoint, a skill, sadly, clearly lacking in many examples of Western journalism today.

The notion of film as a reflector, refractor, and commentator on national and cultural identity is well established. While some authors point out the degree to which film tends toward the reinforcement of boundaries related to culture (Norris, 2005; Keller, 2003; Tzanelli, 2003), sexuality (Shugart, 2003), or gender (Celeste Kearney, 2005; Raw, 2004), others are careful to consider those films which display breakdowns in identity or the very categories within which these identities are traditionally circumscribed, especially in the context of European integration (Daković, 2006; Doughty & Griffiths, 2006; Sundholm, 2006; Law, 2005). Authors explore the gray area between these two extremes as well (Ezra & Sanchez, 2005), a crucial example of which is Jaiyan Mi's (2005) investigation of a new "visually imagined community" in China which is effected through television programming displaying "a problematic televisual collage of both Chinese and Western images for national consumption in post-Mao Era" (327). Nayar (2004), finally, detects modes through which identification between viewer and character takes place despite a complete lack of coordination of any visible identities such as race or nationality. Engagement with films and the scholarship that critique them, then, are essential for the creation of critical thinking skills in a world that is defined by its global, mediated nature.

A politically and cinematically historical case study which helps to elucidate this need for what might be called a cross-disciplinary, contextual journalism education is that of the ongoing relationship between China and Taiwan and the emerging consciousness of one another on the part of their respective citizens. This relationship is, to a very large degree, a singular one, and we will outline the historical context in detail below. Suffice it to say that an entire generation – perhaps more – of Chinese citizens came of age largely ignorant of their counterparts across the Taiwan Strait, and that this ignorance was suddenly and steadily eroded starting in the late 1980s with the repeal of martial law in Taiwan, the opening up toward a market economy on the mainland, and the reintroduction of travel and media between the two. Part of this erosion was the increasing availability of cinematic texts, a trend which was beginning to flower around the time of Taiwan's official introduction into the "multichannel environment" (Berggreen, 1997), its resultant "transition" and "flux" (37), and the production of two key films from opposite sides of the Strait.

This transitional moment also had another aspect of historical significance. The intense speculation and discussion about the then upcoming Hong Kong handover in 1997 created much uncertainty in Taiwan and great anticipations in China. Some observers even inferred that this handover would pave the way for Taiwan-China reunification. As June 30, 2007 marked the 10-year anniversary of the handover, the relationship between Taiwan and the mainland once again enters another stage of vacillation and negotiation.

This paper, then, is partially textual and partially historical. By using examples from a particular historical moment, we seek to illustrate and engage with a problem that has nonetheless continued to fester in journalism education for the past decade, a decade in which the world needed it to do more.² *Ermo* (1994, directed by Xiaowen Zhou of China) and *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* (1994, directed by Ang Lee of Taiwan)

² For a similar example of historical film analysis in the context of Germany (albeit one that is not concerned with journalism education), see Soldovieri (2006).

are both, on the surface, little concerned with the political relationship between the mainland and Taiwan. Embedded within their respective stories, however, are countless attempts at illustrating the ambivalent nature of each culture's engagement with modernity, a concept and a force around which much of the conflict between the two parties revolves. Part of this essay will seek to uncover these nuances and to point out that the easy conflation of the Chinese mainland with Communism and austerity, and of Taiwan with Western capital, is made more difficult by an understanding of these two films, each of which would have been available to the (mainland or Taiwan) "other" around the time of their release. What we posit, looking back at these films and the news stories that were their contemporaries, is that a tentative cinematic discussion was taking place, and that the awareness of such a discussion makes one's understanding of this complex international and intercultural relationship richer. By engaging with the cross-Strait journalism published during the same year in North America, we suggest that the latter is little concerned with these complexities. What emerges from these films, in the end, is a sense not of a division between China and Taiwan, but rather a Trans-Chinese imagination that underpins all political activity in what has been called "Greater China" (Sinclair & Harrison, 2004). It should not be inferred from our argument here that nothing has changed geopolitically or domestically for these cultures since 1994; rather, this particular moment should be read as an instructive exemplar. The possibility that this case study is indicative of other geopolitical situations with which a journalist might be confronted is imperative toward understanding film as a tool for media pedagogy, and as a subject of study for more than just film critics.

Historical background: Taiwan and the mainland

Until 1949, the island of Taiwan, located about 100 miles of the south coast of mainland China, was one of the 35 provinces of the Republic of China (ROC). In 1949, the Republic's Nationalist government, known as the Kuomintang (KMT), retreated to Taiwan and five sets of islets from mainland China after losing the civil war to the Communists. Taiwan and those islets began to be known as Taiwan, R.O.C. The KMT declared authority over the mainland and Taiwan and positioned itself as the only legitimate Chinese government. Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) founded the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949 and claimed the same authority over the same land as did ROC, considering Taiwan as its 23rd province. Thus, 1949 witnessed the beginning of a still unfinished chapter on "the two Chinas" in Chinese history (Wang & Lo, 2000; Yan, 2000). The two parties set to organize and engineer two societies as they saw fit. In four decades, from certain perspectives, an enormous chasm developed between the two sides.

To many observers, the most important contrasts between the two sides were "the economic growth that occurred in the ROC and the process of social-political change that was interwoven with economic growth. The absence of any matching trends in the PRC widened the gulf between the two societies" (Myers, 1996, p. xxii). To be more specific, economically, the ROC was "the envy of the developing world," while the PRC remained "backward" (ibid., p. xi). Politically, in Taiwan, the Democratic-Progressive Party (DPP) was legalized in 1989. Thus, for the first time in Chinese history, a political coalescence was institutionalized and "independent of the chain of command under the head of state" (ibid., p. xiv). In contrast, the crush of the

democracy demonstrators in Tien-an-men Square in 1989 reverted the mainland “to an overtly coercive mode it had begun to leave behind after the death of Mao in 1976” (ibid., p. xiv).

However, behind those glaring contrasts, some parallels seemed to underline these two apparently diverging societies. For example, both the CCP and the KMT reinforced their control of the government with a vast and tight network of auxiliary organizations. Before 1979, both governments sought to paint pictures of the other side in the worst possible tones. No journalists were ever allowed to cross the Strait. Cultural, academic or scientific exchanges were not permitted. Any cultural products, such as books, newspapers, films, television shows from one side were banned on the other.

Moreover, no communication of any kind was permitted between the citizens of Taiwan and the mainland. There were no mail, telegraph or telephone services to bridge the Strait. As a result, parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives were forever separated and had no hope of ever seeing each other again. For citizens of both societies, information about “the other” finally became available during the 1970s and only through very limited private channels. In the 1970s, overseas Chinese “in significant numbers visited both mainland China and Taiwan and gave their friends firsthand accounts of what they had learned, but such information was not available to the general public” (Clough, 1993, p. 79).

Then, the early 1980s saw the weakening of the barriers to information flow. Pursuing a united-front policy aimed at forging people-to-people links across the Strait, China began to publish selected works by Taiwan authors. In November 1987, four months after the martial law was lifted, for the first time in nearly 40 years, Taiwan began to allow its citizens to visit relatives in mainland, which produced a breakthrough in the flow of information about the mainland to Taiwan. Nevertheless, this flow was still very limited, for only a very small percentage of people in Taiwan were able to journey back. But beginning in April 1988, after 40 years of complete silence, limited mail, telegraph and telephone service between Taiwan and the mainland finally began (Clough, 1993).

From this perspective, despite the sharp contrasts in economic, political and ideological differences, for four decades, Chinese on both sides of the Strait had the *same* ignorance of the other and in many ways of themselves. Both sides began to reach out to the other and re-search and re-define selves, and this odyssey was set against the backdrop of the 1990s and the concurrent complication of dualities like globalization and localization, modernity and tradition, and feminist and patriarchal ideology. At the same time, the once mutually exclusive rhetoric of “two Chinas” gradually shifted to a more inclusive narrative. The two Chinas were now discussed as the “Cultural China” or the “Greater China” (Sinclair & Harrison, 2004).

Clough (1998) reports no less than four major “streams of influence” over Taiwan’s cultural identity: “the traditional China stream, the Japanese stream, the Republic of China stream, and the cosmopolitan stream” (10). Historically, the KMT had downplayed the island itself as a source of cultural heritage, emphasizing instead the attachment to the Chinese mainland. A greater proportion of native Taiwanese involved in government, however, and the allowance of native languages in certain circles, had effected a shift by the mid- to late 1990s whereby Taiwan’s identification

with the mainland had been deemphasized in favor of a stress on Taiwan's own national character (Clough, 1998, p. 20). That this cultural balance is in flux and a source of great ambivalence between the two is perhaps an understatement. But what is also interesting in the consideration of the films under study is the degree to which this time frame – given the conditions of increasing engagement punctuated by alternating moments of diplomacy and hostility – can be understood as a high-water mark of cross-strait identity searching on the part of Chinese on both sides.

Culture, according to Tu (1998), is the linchpin of a nuanced political understanding of the island in the 1990s, a time when “cultural identity (had) become a litmus test for self-definition, ethnic consciousness, political loyalty or life-orientation” and was “the core problem defining Taiwan's ‘position’ in the Chinese world, East Asia, the Asia-Pacific region and the global community” (72). Key to this discussion of culture was Taiwan's relationship to the mainland, a relationship that Tu is at pains to characterize as only a part of the repertoire from which Taiwanese were choosing identities at this time, but which nonetheless acted as the most common pole against which “Taiwaneseness” was defined. Huang (2000, p.143) reports that, by 1995, 23.9 percent of Taiwan residents identified themselves as “Taiwanese,” 23.9 percent identified as “Chinese,” and 50 percent identified as both. But the duality here is no clean old/new, communist/capitalist one, as the once “romanticized motherland” of China had been degraded by this time in public discourse into a “disenchanted marketplace (full of) corrupt officials, desperate intellectuals, unreliable merchants and callous relatives” (ibid., p. 75).

Taiwan and China as mediated entities

A review of the themes explored in mid-1990s Western journalism concerning China and Taiwan – and the assumptions which undergird these themes – shows that little was known about the diasporic conditions of “Greater China” or “cultural China,” and that journalists were rather more content to think of China and Taiwan as bounded, known entities. Some (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 1994; Rohter, 1994; Ziegler, 1994) choose simply to reify the trope of the closed, coercive Chinese state, while others, though they engage with globalization as a catalyst inside China, analyze the issue in strictly economic terms (Manning & Stern, 1994; Mickleburgh, 1994). There appears at least one op-ed urging the UN to include Taiwan as a second-seat to China in the mold of two Germanies (Metzler, 1994), as well as an interesting discussion of a particularly sensitive case in which the precedents for travel between the neighbors were tested (Schreiner, 1994). A majority of the cross-strait journalism undertaken in the year of Lee's and Zhou's films' release is concerned with the upcoming or just-completed Taiwanese elections, in which the opposition DPP took the mayorship of Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, in the republic's first open elections. While there are many brief, play-by-play reports of the election (cf. Manthorpe, 1994a), those few stories which attempt a deeper understanding of the vote tend in the process to establish facile dichotomous parallels between political stance and cultural identity (Manthorpe, 1994b). Lacking in all of these pieces is any engagement with people whose identities, sympathies, and interests lie on both sides of the Strait; moreover, there is displayed little understanding of or curiosity about the mediated perceptions of the Other which inform the experiences and attitudes of mainland Chinese and those living in Taiwan (and Hong Kong, for that matter).

We contend that a familiarity with the themes explored in the two films we offer as case studies would engender questions that make journalism on globalization and “glocalization” (Robertson 1995) more specific, incisive and contextual.

“Taiwaneseness” and “Chineseness,” in the mid- to late 1990s, are in the tenuous position, as identifications, of being neither mutually exclusive nor divorced from a historical and ideological sense of polarity, and much of this flux can be related to the nature of global media. The increasingly simultaneous availability of information in all corners of the globe has led theorists like Giddens (1991) to posit “time-space distanciation” – the displacement of individuals in what he terms “late” or “high” modernity. Global media, according to this argument, allow a reformulation of one’s spatial and temporal “place” in the world such that each individual is confronted with, as it were, new and unfamiliar neighbors. This radical expansion of what might be termed the “known community” has led to widespread consideration of the mutability of national boundaries (Morley & Robins, 1995; Chan & Ma, 2002), which asks how “we position ourselves within the new global cultural space” and how “we reconcile our cognitive existence in hyperspace” (Morley & Robins, 1995, p. 38). Is it any longer tenable to base our “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) on presumably national commonalities of language, geography, or, ultimately, “culture”? Is this a tenable strategy for both those “within” national contexts and those who report on them from “without”?

Ermo (1994), Eat, Drink, Man, Woman (1994), and the Trans-Chinese engagement with modernity

Synopses of the films

Ermo, the title character of Zhou’s film, is the village Chief’s wife and they have a son, Tiger. The Chief regards his title with an enormous sense of tragic irony, as both the changing nature of the village social structure and his ongoing problems with impotence have rendered him quite ineffectual. Ermo, meanwhile, keeps busy making twisty noodles late into the night, an avocation which barely keeps her family above water and disallows the ownership of a television. Her neighbors, a man nick-named Blindman and his wife, do however have a television, and this has caused Tiger to spend, in Ermo’s opinion, inordinate time next door. The television thus becomes the object toward which Ermo moves, obsessively counting and saving money in the hope of one day making the purchase.

Sales in the village are finite, however, and Blindman soon offers to bring Ermo into the city with him on his daily trips so that she might sell her noodles. Soon an affair develops between them and Blindman finds Ermo a job in the city. Ermo, over time, becomes ensconced in the working world and overwhelmed by the equation of an earned wage (expressed finally in her repeated sale of her blood).

In an effort to stop Ermo from such self-flagellation in pursuit of money, Blindman begins subsidizing her wages. When Ermo discovers the deception, she breaks off the relationship with Blindman. She continues to amass funds and finally purchases the largest television set in the department store. The home of the Chief is once again the focal point of the village. Tiger and his friends are no longer absent next door,

and Ermo sits in the darkness, completely exhausted, as the television shows pictures from far away places.

Eat, Drink, Man, Woman (EDMW) concerns a family of three young women headed by a widowed chef, Master Chu. As he begins to lose his sense of taste, Chu must count on a trusted assistant to confirm the quality of his restaurant preparations, and the sense of helplessness he feels at the onset of this transition is echoed in the ever-widening orbit of his daughters, all of whom face coming-of-age moments throughout the course of the film and, in turn, assert their independence.

The oldest daughter, a high-school teacher, is committed to her father's well being and has clearly imagined her role as the replacement for her mother (who passed away when she was four). The middle daughter, a rapidly escalating executive with an international corporation, harbors an incredible (but unsanctioned) passion and talent for elaborate cooking. Finally, the youngest, a 20-year-old student, works at Wendy's and inadvertently attracts the attention of a friend's love interest, Raymond.

Their neighbor, a young woman with a school-aged daughter named Shan-Shan, is going through a nasty divorce and attracts Chef Chu's sympathy. Chu also befriends Shan-Shan's grandmother, Mrs. Liang.

Each of the Sunday dinners portrayed in the film serves as an opportunity for one of the main characters to "make a little announcement." The first of these is the middle daughter's purchase of a new apartment, which later is doomed by the bankruptcy of the building's owner. The second is the youngest daughter's admission that she is pregnant and moving in with Raymond's family. The following week, the oldest daughter announces her elopement with the school's volleyball coach. Finally, now that the middle daughter has declined a promotion overseas, Master Chu makes the announcement that he is planning on selling the house and starting over with the young mother and daughter next door.

Modernity and ambivalence in Ermo and EDMW

The opening sequences of both films tell the viewer much about the ongoing Asian transition between manifestations of tradition and modernity. The terms for this duality are set in both films by the first few frames. In *Ermo*, the viewer's first stimulus is Ermo's plaintive cry, "Twisty noodles!" As the darkness lifts, the viewer is presented with Ermo's positionality on the side of the street, patiently calling out her song until she is approached by a potential buyer. Immediately apparent here is an image of displacement, whereby food is no longer solely for sustenance but also for sale, where the noodle is no longer only a staple but also a commodity, and where the craft of making the noodle is, perhaps, not as crucial as the craft of selling the noodle. The opening shot of *EDMW*, meanwhile, is of a Taipei intersection, empty just before the turning of a traffic light. The light turns, and a multitude of motorbikes, bicycles and cars is unleashed from the top of the shot to the bottom, the rush of engines breaking the relative silence which preceded it. This five- or six-second shot then gives way to Master Chu slowly and carefully preparing food in his kitchen. The first few frames are silent save for the sound of knives on cutting boards, but soon the quiet gives way to a traditional soundtrack of Chinese strings.

The juxtaposition is striking and here, as in *Ermo*, it expresses the confrontation of old and new through the symbolic medium of food.

Food

The making of food continues to fulfill key metaphorical roles. In *Ermo*, the nocturnal preparation of twisty noodles (a clever symbol for the Chief's impotence) is a clear substitution for the sexual activity she so desperately desires. The sequences in the nighttime courtyard, where Ermo heaves and sweats rhythmically kneading and pressing the noodles, are clearly the film's most erotic (Ermo and Blindman's roadside tryst notwithstanding). Ironically, the product of this activity, the noodles themselves, act as the vehicle for Ermo's increasing independence from Chief, her emergence into a capitalist economy, and her eventual purchase of the TV.

There is also great focus on the preparation of the noodles from a more technical point of view, an illustration of the process which seeks to glorify the methodical nature of Ermo's task. Her connection with the food is quite literal as she kneads the dough with her feet and hands and acts as the primary catalyst in every aspect of the preparation. This valorization of "old" ways of food preparation is confirmed when one of Ermo's co-workers has his hand cut off by the machine which presses the noodles in the city restaurant. Ermo is clearly terrified by this prospect.

This focus on method is also a key component of the presentation of food in Lee's film. From the opening shots, and throughout the film's constant reorganization around the Sunday dinner table, the care and time taken to prepare the meal is extraordinary. That the preparation of food and the cultivation of ingredients have more importance to Chu than the maintenance of his family relations becomes increasingly evident as the film progresses. As an aging patriarch ill-equipped to handle traditionally maternal roles, Chu fails repeatedly to connect with his daughters on any significant emotional level. Thus the plot device of the chef losing his sense of taste seems simultaneously tragic and just.

But perhaps the sense in which food fulfills the most congruent function in the two films is as a symbol of transition. While the television in *Ermo* is clearly the most obvious indicator of the influx of western values, changes in the preparation and enjoyment of food work in both films to cue the viewer to a more nuanced and erosive set of changes. In *EDMW*, one of the great ironies is that Chu's youngest daughter, Jia-Ning, works at an American fast food company. For her, the preparation of food is simply a job like any other, and she pays little attention to what she is doing. Placed alongside the opening sequence of the film, the indifference to culinary creation is striking. The pace of life which spawns such fast-food eateries, the Western city life, is echoed in Jia-Ning's whirlwind romance, pregnancy, and marriage. All things are out of order: the youngest daughter leaves home first and a complete meal can be ready in sixty seconds. The increasingly anachronistic nature of what has popularly, in Western circles, been called "slow food" is further illustrated by Chef Chu's loss of taste. Not until the middle daughter rejects an offer to move to Amsterdam (symbolically rejecting the West) and decides to live in her childhood home is Master Chu's gustatory sense restored. Tradition, to some degree, has been restored as well.

In *Ermo*, we have already seen the horror inflicted upon the unlucky kitchen employee by the noodle press. More subtle is Ermo's shift from a producer of sustenance and modest wages to a consumer. Living a subsistence lifestyle in the remote village, Ermo is gradually swept into the current of the market economy. Her increasingly frequent interactions with vendors, her maturation as a business woman, her purchase of the "city girl" brazier, and other moments in the film mark this progression.

Gender

Another important vehicle through which modernity is expressed in the two films is gender. The relationships between men and women in both films are expressive of a number of other key dichotomies, such as traditional and modern, East and West, and collective and individual. On both Taiwan and the mainland, the changing expectations of the female – both her own and those foisted upon her – are set off against the suddenly unresolved place of male hegemony.

Ermo as a film is a narrative conflation of two themes – sexuality and capital. Ermo's seduction by Blindman is as much related to consumerism as it is to passion. Ermo makes a sequential transition from a producer and a shrewd businesswoman to a consumer, swept up in shallow desires and the hollow promise of a television. In her desire to take advantage of the temptations of the market, Ermo then becomes a product in two senses. First, the scene displaying her first experience with blood donation is wonderfully illustrative of the stakes of her changing nature. Her pleas to the nurse to stop the transfusion process, at first urgent and then increasingly half-hearted, are evocative of many clichéd love scenes in Western films where the reluctant female is broken down by the relentless passion of the dominant male. As Ermo gives her blood away, and then begins to sell it, she becomes in every sense a product, and her powerlessness in this regard is mirrored by her decreasing power as a female. As she moves in this downward trajectory, her husband moves in a rough ascension from dependent and despondent to sensible and, finally, regnant in his newly technologized home full of visitors.

In Lee's film, much of the difficulty experienced by the predominant characters in adapting to new modes of operation in an increasingly Western milieu are expressed in terms of gender roles. The oldest daughter is a teacher of boys, and her stern demeanor is indicative of her conflictual roles as professional authority and gendered subordinate. As her interest in her suitor blossoms, her walls begin to weather, until finally, on the day she angrily addresses the school in search of her secret admirer, she sheds her conservative dress for long, flowing hair, seductive make-up, and a flashy red dress. It is only by embracing her femininity that she puts in motion the events that lead to her marriage. The middle daughter, meanwhile, is adamant about her independence, working diligently to obtain the capital necessary to leave her father's house on her own and, later, getting the promotion which will allow her to leave the East altogether. Her duping at the hands of a real estate developer not only lands her back in the family home, it also expresses the exposed condition of the woman (as a synecdoche for all citizens in an emerging international economy) at the hands of emerging forces of global capital. The youngest daughter, finally, along with her friend, finds herself struggling with the nuances of dating and appropriate gendered behavior. As Raymond, who begins the film as a suitor to Jin-Ning's friend,

is pushed away, Jia-Ning becomes the object of his affections. Only later does she discover her friend's dismay that her strategy of "playing hard to get" has backfired on her. All three players in the triangle are confused by the shifting roles of male and female in a modern courtship that no longer plays according to proscriptions and family intervention.

As things fall into place, however, a curious reversal takes place. In the end, the oldest daughter is the first to marry, the youngest begins preparing for the life of a young mother, and the middle daughter moves into the family home and takes over her father's kitchen. All three ignore the opportunities offered them by the emerging Western/modern sensibility. Chef Chu, meanwhile, subverts both expectations and tradition by passing on Mrs. Liang for her much younger daughter, and the burgeoning relationship between him and Shan-Shan is revealed as a second chance at a less stringent conception of fatherhood. Thus, although the film is ostensibly about family life, loss, love, and youth, that there is no clear cut conservatism or modernity on the part of the main characters is the key statement of the film. All is in tremendous flux, and no one seems any longer to have a terribly solid grasp on their roles or expectations.

Chef Chu and the Chief are, finally, near mirror images of one another, especially with reference to the inter-identifications related to the changing place of patriarchy in the Asian social whole. Their titles, both indicating substantial levels of respect, become ironic (especially in their own eyes) as their respective afflictions disallow what they believe to be adequate performance. Chef Chu's loss of his gustatory sense is, of course, a devastating blow for someone in his position. The Chief equates social standing to sexual prowess, or is at least acutely aware of their simultaneous decline. In this way, both characters' sensual dysfunction acts as a metaphor for the shifting hegemony of maleness in the face of encroaching embodiments of modernity. As the fast food restaurant – both by employing and empowering his young, urbane daughter and by cheapening the enjoyment of food – devalues the Chef's social status, so too does the consumer market and the cult of individuality debase the Chief's standing as patriarch. And yet this current ebbs and flows with the reactions of the characters in question, as by embracing various forms of youth or openness (such as a young wife or a giant television) the aging males find that their powers return in some form.

The Trans-Chinese Experience

As the oldest daughter in a motherless family, Lee's Jia-Jen sees it as her duty to care for her father and younger sisters. She fabricates a story of being abandoned by her boyfriend and, pretending to be broken-hearted, she vows never to love again. Thus her place is with her family, especially her father. In reality, this is a likely scenario in a Chinese society while quite improbable in other, especially Western cultures. Jia-Jen becomes bitter of this self sacrifice, however, and constantly struggles with the expected duty of a daughter from a traditional value system within an ever modernized society. Similarly, Ermo's choice of staying in an unhappy and seemingly empty marriage is another probable reality in a Chinese society. While she ventures out of her physical boundaries and emotional constraints and even discusses with Blindman her hope of divorcing the Chief, she returns to the village and the marriage in the end. No matter which side of the Strait they call home, Chinese females seem

to be caught between a strong sense of traditional expectations and the needs for self realization. While Ermo's vexing experience may not be as big a struggle in Taiwan, for divorce is much more common in Taiwan than in the mainland, female characters' various choices throughout both movies are still confined within the female gender expectations of a Chinese patriarchal society.

A disconnection between generations and between the old and the new is also a profound symbol of Chinese experience. Chef Chu and Mrs. Liang speak Mandarin with a mainlander accent while all the daughters and the grand daughter speak the same language with a Taiwanese accent. In Ermo, the older generation (Ermo and Chief) is still concerned about the maintenance and the appearance of family while the new generation (Tiger and his friends) instead focuses on material quest, in this case expressed by the television. This disconnection is reflective of the ideological differences and conflicts between the old and the new guards within both societies. The ideologies, manifested in political and social policies, of the early era are still casting a long shadow over the representatives of the new guard who are now on the watch on both sides of the Strait. The Tien-an-men setback illustrated a complex triangle of new thoughts, new guards and the old power.

Both films convey one of the virtues of cultural Chineseness, which is to be able to conform and sacrifice for the greater good of the collective – in both cases, the family. They also pinpoint the inflictions of being Chinese: the pain and frustration of a lifetime of bondage expressed in the expectation to carry on an old tradition in a postmodern era. While both movies in the end present a kind of closure to their characters' struggles, they are a poignant reminder that while the governments on both sides engage in rhetorical wars, citizens fight for inner peace away from the political battle. Yet this personal journey occurs not in a vacuum but within the rhetorical arena created between the two sides. This is an aspect not often seen in journalistic reporting on Taiwan and the mainland.

Discussion: The Trans-Chinese Imagination and a contextual journalism education

Employing believable characters, persuasive plots and understanding of heart, both films painfully yet skillfully pursue the meaning and the virtues and inflictions of being Chinese at a time of cultural, social, economic, ideological and political transition. Every metaphor in these films echoes the seemingly disparate yet ultimately similar voices rattling inside the Chinese psyche on both sides of the Strait. In both the Taiwanese and Mainland "imagined communities," it seems compromise, sacrifice and adjustment are equally necessary in order to achieve some sort of personal or social satisfaction and harmony. Viewers are left to ponder whether that satisfaction and harmony is the parsimonious choice both Chinese societies face at their respective crossroads. For example, even with the apparently active and important role of females in both societies, at the end of both stories, the gender hierarchies have not been dissolved, but rather shifted and reformatted. Just like every other symbol in both films, in this transitional process, people are dislocated from their perceived roots while new destinations of settlement are not yet in sight.

Both films' iconographies draw heavily from the collective lexicon of both societies. They engage in a vigorous way with a historically specific experience—the social, cultural, ideological and political transition and dislocation of both Chinese societies. They raise a common sigh so piteous and profound that it shatters much of the political confrontation between the two sides. From the surface, the Strait serves as a physical, cultural, ideological and political divide, but beneath that division is one single undercurrent that highlights a cultural imagination borne of the frustration and pain of dislocation, one of the defining Chinese experiences of the late twentieth-century. A historically specific Trans-Chinese imagination thus was conceived: a shared and loosely organized Chinese-centric – but not necessarily Chinese – world view that cultivates various interpretations, representations and understanding of the changing social, economic and political contours in both Chinese societies.

What we are proposing, then, is a repurposing of the analysis of film texts with reference to students approaching journalism, both in pre-professional and critical modes. While the “film class” currently enjoys a rather safe harbor in most liberal arts curricula, the degree to which that class is expressly linked to the skills and ideals of the journalistic craft probably varies to a great degree between institutions and no doubt in some is completely absent. We suggest as a starting point that journalism departments find a way to require such a course of its graduates. But having a single engagement with film and its analysis (ticking off the box, as it were) generally misses the point. Rather, a journalism education which truly values a contextual approach will find ways to incorporate the study of global film (and literature and art) texts into all of its courses and will encourage its students to use these implements each time they approach a story. In the end, the information they gain from doing so may not appear in the story, but what we are suggesting is not that the critical analysis of cultural creations necessarily generates more answers, but rather that it encourages better questions.

While one can obviously state that film is merely entertainment, it is also a cultural product which is a communion. The consummation is created by the producers and viewers in their joint imagination. One could also say the same, moreover, for literature, and yet most educators do not hesitate to suggest that the familiarity with appropriate fiction and non-fiction literature creates greater understanding of cultural contexts (e.g. post-colonial literature as an entrée into the understanding of diasporic cultures such as that of India). The Trans-Chinese imagination established from these two films is a direct contradiction of many common beliefs; the binary description of the two opposite Chinas in the popular press dissolves in the face of this Trans-Chinese imagination. Re-examining and re-configuring issues facing the Greater China does not belong exclusively to the realm of politics. As history has shown repeatedly, journalists occupy an important role in every society's social and political development. A multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach and effort must be made in order to deepen and improve reporting in a contemporary and ever-shifting cultural and political landscape. Journalists and journalism educators should be encouraged to turn to the sphere of culture, in this case film, to see how the popular image articulates its views and ideas about the social world in which they live.

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