

The Story of Movies International Film Classroom – Project Diary

Wednesday, May 7, 2008. Welcome Banquet

The American delegation arrived in Shanghai on Tuesday, May 6, 2008. The team spent the morning and afternoon of their first full day (Wednesday) in China visiting historical and cultural sites, including the Jade Buddha Museum in Shanghai, the Bund tourist area, and the Pudong skyline.



Statues at the Jade Buddha Temple

In the evening, the delegation attended the first official event, a welcome banquet hosted by the project's partners, The Shanghai Film Archive and Shanghai University. During this opening session, American and Chinese educators sat together and over dinner had the opportunity to get acquainted. Included among the Chinese educators was the principal of East Urban High School, Shanghai. Also included in this group were two primary school educators from Shangyu who traveled to Shanghai specifically for this occasion and to attend the American presentation at East Urban High School on Thursday morning.

US Delegates (listing below)



Conversation that evening among the educators focused primarily on topics relative to the educational systems of both countries; the organization of Chinese schools, subjects taught in various grade levels, and the Chinese school calendar year were among the generalized topics. More specific discussion focused on the use of film in the Chinese classroom and the types of films Chinese children prefer. The principal of East Urban High School assured us that, like American children, Chinese children enjoy action films and love stories, a comment that generated good-humored laughter among the group. As they say, the ice was broken.

Among the other attendees: from Shanghai University, filmmaker and Dean of the School of Film and TV Art & Technology Xie Jin and Executive Deputy Dean Jin Guanjun; and Director Chen Xiaomeng of the Shanghai Film Archive.

Group photo, U.S. Delegates (from left to right):

Story of Movies curriculum writer Catherine Gourley, Bloomfield Middle School educators Suzanne Johnson & Jody Sutula, filmmaker and Film Foundation Board Member Curtis Hanson, Twentieth Century Fox's Schawn Belston, Library of Congress' Mike Mashon, and The Film Foundation's Margaret Bodde & Jessica Bursi

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Thursday, May 8, 2008. East Urban High School, Shanghai



East Urban High School Tour

This morning the American delegation visited East Urban High School in Shanghai. Accompanied by the principal of the school, Chinese students met us at the door of the administration building. The students acted as hosts for the American delegation, leading us through an exhibit about the school and its past headmasters. The students narrated the history of the school, allowing time for questions from the delegation and time to inspect the various photographs,

posters, and objects on display. Following the exhibit and a brief stop for refreshments, also served by students, the delegation proceeded to the school itself. When we entered the classroom, the assembled students applauded.

Approximately 60 students were in attendance in rows of seats around the room. The delegation joined Chinese educators—classroom teachers—who were already seated at tables. Also in attendance was Alys Spensley from the cultural affairs office of the American Embassy in Shanghai.

Cathy Gourley, curriculum writer for The Film Foundation's *Story of Movies* project, made a presentation that included four film clips, two from the American film *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962, d. Robert Mulligan) and two from SOM's teaching DVD. Prior to screening each film clip, Gourley provided an introduction. The first clip focused on the curriculum itself, explaining what *The Story of Movies* is, and why and how it was developed in America.



Story of Movies Classroom Presentation

The second clip focused on the issue of segregation and civil rights in America, both in the 1930s during the period in which the film is set, and the 1960s, the period in which the film was made. Gourley explained the concept of Jim Crow laws that existed in Southern states in

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America in the 1930s, as well as how the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the film version of the novel reflected the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s. Students then viewed part of an interview with Brock Peters, an African American actor featured in the film.



Shanghai University Professor River Stone answers a student's question

Discussion following this film segment was quite lengthy, with students asking many questions about life in America. One particularly interesting observation a Chinese student made was that no one in the delegation was African American. We were, in fact, all Caucasian and they wanted to know why white people would care about the struggles of another race. It was a particularly insightful moment.

The question allowed the delegation to address an important component of the civil rights movement in America: that many Americans, and not just African Americans, believed the Jim Crow laws were unjust, and joined together to change the laws. In other words, the question—innocently asked—opened the door for a more in-depth discussion of American democracy and how American people do have a voice in their government.

The third and fourth film segments were from the film itself. The scenes chosen for screening relied primarily on visual images and the film's use of music and sound effects to convey meaning. Discussion followed that focused on story elements and human emotions that bridge our American and Chinese cultures. In the final scene, "A Look at Boo," the student reaction was right on target. What American children find suspenseful and even frightening and at times funny, so too did our Chinese audience. The Chinese students questioned Gourley on the use of a mockingbird rather than some other bird. What did it symbolize? Rather than answering that question directly, however, the delegation encouraged the students to speculate on the meaning of the symbol.



EUHS teacher asks the US delegation a question

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Also during this discussion, one of the Chinese educators commented on the American media's perception of China (this was within weeks after anti-Chinese comments from Jack Cafferty on CNN) and America's perception and perhaps biased thinking about China, based on the films about Chinese people that Americans have seen. Specifically, he wanted to ensure that the American delegation understood that China was not a country of "kung fu fighters" and that Chinese products were not "junk," but he could see how Americans might think this, faulting Chinese filmmakers for perpetuating stereotypes. Again, such interaction was insightful, allowing the American delegation to understand the sometimes angry feelings some Chinese have about how they are portrayed in the American media. Likewise, the Chinese commented on gangs and gangsters in America, questioning the delegation about whether these still exist.

The morning's program ended with a lengthy question-and-answer session about America in general and American teenagers in particular. Chinese students were interested in knowing which Chinese actress Americans believed to be the most beautiful and then proceeded to tell us their choices. We also asked the students to recommend one film that they would like American students to screen in order to better understand Chinese youth. The overwhelming choice was *Beijing Bicycle*. When asked why this particular film, they responded that it was about youth and it was contemporary—not a film about China's past. It was a film that explored the meaning and challenges of friendship. Following the presentation, the delegation had the opportunity to tour more of the school building, and observe various classrooms.

**Curtis Hanson awaits translation
of an audience question**



In the evening, the delegation attended a screening of guest director Curtis Hanson's *L. A. Confidential* (1997) at the Shanghai Film Archive's large commercial theater. The event was "standing room only," and the audience was predominantly film students. A lively question-and-answer session—with the aid of a translator—followed the screening. Among the discussion points were questions that focused on depictions of "gangsters" and violence in American films. Like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *L.A. Confidential* is a film that is set in a different time period than that in which it was made. It focused on a chapter of America's past, 1950s Hollywood. The distinction between the two periods was made during the discussion session.

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Friday, May 9, 2008. Shanghai University, Shanghai

The American team traveled to Shanghai University (Bao Shan campus) for a master class with filmmaker Curtis Hanson. The moderator of this event was Professor River Stone. The program focused primarily on Hanson's work, with a screening of numerous clips from his films. The American educators did not participate in the q & a that followed. However, as members of the audience, they had the opportunity to observe the behavior and interaction of college-level students. Additionally, they had opportunities to speak informally with some of those students following the program.



Curtis Hanson with SU students following q & a session

Saturday, May 10, 2008. Preservation Panel, Drums Along the Mohawk Screening, Shanghai

LOC's Mike Mashon discusses the new NAVCC Center



On Saturday morning, the group attended a preservation symposium at Shanghai Film Archive. This was a round-table discussion format and featured speakers from Shanghai University, including technology students who presented examples of digital restoration. Also in attendance and making brief presentations were professional archivists from the China Film Archive in Beijing, Shanghai Film Group and Shanghai Film Archive. The American team's presenters

included Bob Rosen, Dean of the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television; archivist Mike Mashon of the Library of Congress, who presented a slideshow about the LOC's new National Audio-Visual Conservation Center in Culpeper, VA; and Twentieth Century Fox's Schawn Belston, who presented a before-and-after reel from the restored *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945, d. John M. Stahl).

The session broke for a group lunch, then re-assembled in the afternoon for a screening of The Film Foundation and Twentieth Century Fox-funded restoration of *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939, d. John Ford). This film is set during the American Revolution, and a brief introduction to that historical context was provided prior to the screening.

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Sunday, May 11, 2008. Shanghai Story Screening, Shanghai

Following a day tour of Shanghai, the delegation again visited the Shanghai Film Archive for a screening of Shanghaiese filmmaker Peng Xiaolian’s 2004 film, *Shanghai Story*. The film was followed by a question-and-answer session with the director. Although the American team participated in this Q-and-A session, the discussion was essentially between the Chinese students in the audience and the filmmaker.

Monday, May 12, 2008. Xie Tang Primary School, Shangyu

“Warm Welcome” from Xie Tang students



The American delegation traveled by bus from Shanghai to outlying Shangyu for a presentation to schoolchildren enrolled in Xie Tang Primary School. The delegation met with the principal of the school as well as several city officials. Again the conversation focused on a comparison of school systems and subjects taught.

This particular school is in a town that does not often have American visitors. Our reception was quite remarkable. Students lined the entrance to the school’s courtyard. Dressed in school uniforms and waving tiny American and Chinese flags, the children chanted “Warm Welcome” while a student band played a patriotic march. Several students had been selected to act as our escorts. They held small microphones and narrated a little bit of school history as they led the delegation through the courtyard and up a flight of stairs to a large open room. Here, children dressed in traditional Chinese costumes performed acrobatic stunts. A band comprised of traditional Chinese instruments played various musical selections. The final performance was a folktale acted out by children, accompanied by music from the band.

Our student-escorts next led us to other sections of the school where children were at work. In one classroom, children sang “Do-Re-Mi” from the American musical *The Sound of Music* (1965, d. Robert Wise) and the instructor explained how this particular school uses American films to teach some basic English vocabulary. In another room, children were constructing three-dimensional scenes; in another, they were practicing calligraphy; and in still another room, children were discussing the American animated film *Finding Nemo* (2003, d. Andrew Stanton).

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Shangyu is the birthplace of Xie Jin and this famous Chinese filmmaker accompanied the American delegation to the primary school, his alma mater. Xie Jin's influence can be seen in the school's curriculum which includes a focus on the arts in general and film in particular. On this day, the school dedicated a museum to the filmmaker. It was in this room that our American delegation gathered to present the next workshop on film. Children from grades 4 and 5 attended this presentation.



Chinese filmmaker Xie Jin visits his alma mater



Xie Tang media students

The students had screened the film, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, before the presentation; therefore curriculum writer Cathy Gourley presented the film segments for screening and led the discussion that followed. This presentation differed from the high school program in that the clips shown were just the two from the film itself. Gourley introduced the Chinese students to the concept of segregation, explaining Jim Crow laws that existed in the 1930s (the period in which the film was set) and the civil rights movement of the 1960s (the period in which the film was made). The children viewed both the opening credits from the film and the lengthier segment, "A Look at Boo." The American educators, in particular, noted with interest the students' reactions during both screenings. Their attention was fixed.

The discussion that followed focused on the emotions the characters were experiencing and the emotions the students in the audience were also experiencing. Their insight into what they had just screened was quite impressive. They commented on the use of light and shadow as well as movement and music to create suspense. The questions and answers were a dialogue between the American educators and the Chinese students. The Chinese educators were attentive but generally allowed the children to respond freely.



**Bloomfield educator
Suzanne Johnson
with Chinese students**

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Following the presentation, the educators had the opportunity to mingle informally with the children and their teachers, in the courtyard of the school. As school was ending for the day, parents arrived to meet their children and escort them home. Parents, too, began to mingle and even take photographs of the children interacting with the Americans. In fact, it was pretty difficult to get everyone to gather and climb back aboard the bus in order to continue our journey to Hangzhou.

Tuesday, May 13, 2008. Hangzhou Tour, Hangzhou

The delegation spent Tuesday touring the relatively smaller city of Hangzhou in the Zhejiang Province. The group visited the beautiful West Lake and the Dragon Well Tea House, where a collective of families produces some of the most famous green tea in the world, as well as a silk factory.



US Delegation in Hangzhou

Wednesday, May 14, 2008. Return to United States

On Wednesday, the delegation returned to their homes across the United States, enriched by their international experience and looking forward to Phase II of the program, when the Chinese delegation visits New York City and Washington, D.C. in March and April 2009.