

Video footage juxtaposed at appropriate points throughout *Rebeka* provides additional, illuminating information: candid street scenes with the ever-present bicyclists, a man repairing shoes while his customer waits, men gambling, various marketplace activities, an apartment house with clothes hung out, and so on. Ideally, I would have liked Rebeka's on-camera time shortened with her voice-over narration complemented by more unrehearsed, revealing scenes. For a young audience, there is too large a proportion of Rebeka just talking to the camera. Late in the program, politics becomes a topic, with Rebeka explaining her decision to become a young pioneer; that is, a member of the Communist party. Soon, however, the Party presence becomes a disruptive one. After Tiananmen Square, Rebeka's family is abruptly asked to, and must, leave.

Though never exactly thrilling to watch, *Rebeka* has a likable, low key manner as well as, at times, the unselfconscious, spontaneous silliness of the title character. Taking us along into formal and informal class exchanges, into courtyards and homes, and into the street, the viewer becomes a young student, too, learning about China as Rebeka does. What may surprise us most is the pleasure with which Rebeka engages her classmates and the genuine, uninhibited acceptance of Rebeka by them. In video footage of her friends shot after Rebeka has left for America, several apologize for not showing more gratitude to her and ask for forgiveness for not acceding to her requests for keepsakes when Rebeka had to leave. Their teacher's prompt, "She's our American friend. Don't say any-

thing bad," is quite revealing, but the children's warm-hearted responsiveness shines through nonetheless.

This video would best complement an entire unit on China, paired with some show-and-tell on food (which Rebeka says she really liked despite reservations about the Chinese eating dogs and cats and "any old bird"). Comparisons and contrasts between the Chinese and American schools, especially the strict code of conduct or the lack thereof, would easily involve students in listing similarities and differences. Transportation (bicycles versus cars), exercising, parties—all suggest numerous topics for discussion, supplemented by more pictures and videos as well as first-hand experience. Inclusion of any student's exposure or knowledge of non-American cultures would enrich the unit further. Finally, Rebeka observes that in one big world, "you think everything's the same wherever you live, but it's really not true." *Rebeka Goes to China* proves this and encourages students to see that, as Rebeka also notes, "China's really different" but learning about it is "like finding a treasure."

DIANE CARSON

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[Rebeka Goes to China won a Bronze Apple Award at the National Educational Film & Video Festival.]

The Story of Qiu Ju

DIRECTED BY ZHANG YIMOU

CHINESE WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

DISTRIBUTED BY COLUMBIA TRISTAR HOME VIDEO

SONY PICTURES PLAZA
10202 WEST WASHINGTON BLVD.
CULVER CITY, CA 90232

1991, 100 MINUTES, COLOR

In *The Story of Qiu Ju*, Zhang Yimou has created a film that is useful in giving students an excellent picture of life in China today. The film can be used with students at any level from middle school through college, though its length suggests caution with lower grade students with limited attention spans.

Most students today are visually oriented; they more easily grasp material presented through images than through the written word. Our students have seen much television coverage of China. These images, though, are mainly of Beijing, Shanghai, and some of the major tourist attractions.

The Story of Qiu Ju allows the student to see another China, that inhabited by perhaps seventy per cent of the population. It is the China of the countryside and those towns and cities not on the tourist or media tracks. Set in northwest China, its images can be used to illustrate many features of Chinese society today. The story line, compelling in a Kafka-like way, easily holds the interest of students.

Gong Li gives a brilliant portrayal of the pregnant Qiu Ju, whose husband has been injured in an altercation with the village cadre. She wants jus-

tice, which can only be achieved by an apology from the cadre. When the nearest Public Security Bureau awards them medical costs and lost earnings, Qiu Ju sets out on a journey through the Chinese legal system.

The decision is appealed to the county town and to the district city with essentially the same result, though she is told of further steps she may take. When her lawsuit also results in the same verdict, she appeals to a higher court.

During her many trips, Qiu Ju's pregnancy moves to its final stage and she goes into labor during the Chinese New Year celebration. The midwife is unable to deliver the baby; the lives of both Qiu Ju and her child are in danger. Most of the villagers are away watching a local opera, and Qiu Ju's husband must appeal for help to the village cadre. Enough manpower is mobilized to take Qiu Ju to the hospital where she gives birth to a son.

In gratitude, Qiu Ju insists that the child's one-month birthday celebration cannot take place without the presence of the village cadre. As the festivities get under way, Qiu Ju learns that her last appeal has revealed that her husband's ribs were broken

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in the original altercation; the village chief has been arrested for assault. The film ends as Qiu Ju fails to intercept the police vehicle carrying the cadre to his incarceration.

The film can be used in a variety of ways. It clearly demonstrates the difference between legality and justice. That the basic nature of the Chinese judicial system is mediating rather than adversarial becomes obvious. Gender roles in modern China are shown, though these are more true of rural than of urban areas. Many in the village are concerned that Qiu Ju has overstepped the bounds of a wife; her relationship with her husband begins to suffer stress as a result.

The continued existence of the extended, patrilocal family is still the rule in rural China. In that China, too, the communal *kang* (the heated brick bed) remains a center of family and

social life in the winter. Students can see various forms of transportation, and the film accurately depicts differences between the countryside and various sized cities. The importance of celebrations, such as a birth and New Year, is shown, and there are excellent scenes of the sprouting free markets. Only the imagination of the individual teacher limits the number of questions that can be generated.

Despite the frustrating quality of Qiu Ju's quest, the story is not without its episodes of humor. Qiu Ju and her sister-in-law are bumpkins in the city, ready to be taken in by some of the more sophisticated urban dwellers. China as a huge village of interested and concerned bystanders comes through on more than one occasion.

Gong Li is brilliant. Billed as "the most beautiful woman in the movies," her portrayal of Qiu Ju clearly demonstrates her

ability as an actress. The rest of the cast excel in their supporting roles, from the concerned local Public Security officer to the kindly and honest District Public Security chief. Her sister-in-law is almost pathetic in her dogged devotion.

In the end, though, we must come back to our students. Though a visual generation, they sometimes don't use their eyes, relying instead on the narration to tell them what they are seeing. One technique that I have found useful, if used in moderation, is to cover the bottom of the monitor so that they cannot see the subtitles. Then, portions of the film are shown, forcing them to see what is there rather than being told what they are seeing. Used in moderation, they truly become observers in seeing many nuances beyond the story line. In a dubbed or English-language film, portions are shown with the sound off.

The Story of Qiu Ju is an excellent way to teach many of the realities of China today. It was adapted from Chen Yuan Bin's *The Wan Family's Lawsuit*.

Art Barbeau

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[*The Story of Qiu Ju* won awards for Best Actress and Best Foreign Film at the 1992 Venice Film Festival. Ed.]

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ACLS

U.S.-China Teachers Exchange Program

The American Council of Learned Societies is now seeking applications for the second year of a three-year exchange program for teachers in American and Chinese secondary schools. This is an unusual opportunity for schools and districts wishing to begin or to strengthen Chinese language and culture programs and for teachers wishing to live and teach in China.

During the 1996-97 school year, the first year of the project, we have American teachers from across the country in "key" secondary schools throughout China—in Beijing, Dalian (Liaoning), Hohhot (Inner Mongolia), Suzhou and Changzhou (Jiangsu), and Chengdu (Sichuan). We anticipate that many of the same schools on the Chinese side will participate in the second and third years of the program.

The American teachers in China teach English as a second language. The Chinese teachers, all of whom teach English as a second language in China, will be prepared to teach Chinese history, language, and culture and/or English as a second language at participating American schools. ACLS sponsors orientation programs for participating teachers in the U.S. and China during the summer before the exchange year.

ACLS pays the salary of visiting Chinese teachers and the transportation of American teachers. Participating American schools continue the salary and benefits of American teachers during their exchange year.

For more information and an application package, please send a letter to the Education Office—China Program, American Council of Learned Societies, 228 East 45th Street, New York, NY 10017.

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