

*Beijing Bicycle*  
@  
**Chinese Film and Society, NEH 2012**

- 1) Synopsis
- 2) Historical background
- 3) Biography of director Wang Xiaoshuai
- 4) Scene-by-scene guide
- 5) Lesson plan 01
- 6) Lesson plan 02
- 7) Lesson plan 03
- 8) Lesson plan 04

Contributors: Jian Guo, Kevin Hurley, Larry Hoffner, Lorraine Romano, Melisa Holden

**1) Synopsis:**

*Beijing Bicycle*, with its original Chinese title as “*Seventeen-year-old’s bicycle*”, or “*The bicycle I had when I was seventeen*”, is a story about youth and growth. In the film, two seventeen-year-old boys, one of whom is a country boy coming to Beijing to make a living as a courier, the other a local city boy with middle class family background, are connected through a bicycle in an interesting and complicated situation. The bicycle means different things for them and both of them rely desperately on the bicycle to ensure their “happiness”. As a result, they struggle with each other to own and re-own the bicycle, though with quite different strategies. The story ends at a street-fighting scene, with both of them beaten up by a gang. Overall, this film tells a riveting story about two boys growing up in Beijing. While the story is centered on the two boys, their friends and people around them, it exposes Beijing at the turn of the 21-century in many other ways.

**2) Historical background:**

Since 1982 the urban population in China has gone from approximately 20% to 55%. This is one of the largest human migrations in history. Most of this migration has been in direct response to the opening up of China’s economy under Deng Xiaoping and the development of special economic zones, mostly located in the eastern part of China. Beijing is one of these special zones and being on the eastern seaboard of China, has seen tremendous growth along with cities like Tianjin and Shanghai. Currently the migrant population in Beijing is 1/3 of the total of approximately 20 million. This poses numerous challenges as the migrant population has not been granted full citizenship in their new homes, but rather they and their children remain citizens of their ancestral origin. They retain their ancestral hukou, or registration documents, which does not afford them the right to public assistance in the cities and therefore the government does not treat them in the same regard. In addition to this, many of the citizens of the cities, such as Beijing, do not hold migrant workers to have equal social standing and look down on them. Beijing has seen many changes since the early 1980’s, most dramatically in the destruction of the old style hutongs in favor of wider boulevards and more modern buildings. Much of the movie has a gritty feel as scenery moves between the city boy’s hutong home and the empty construction sites around the city. This plays back and forth between the traditional living style and the modern developing city and could almost be seen as mirroring the tense relationship

between the two young men. Hutongs, which are walled communities with narrow alleys and communal areas, have served as a community within a larger city for hundreds of years. Most of the demolition of hutongs started in the early 2000's in preparation for the Olympics which were held in 2008. In the present day hutongs serve more as a tourist attraction or conservation of the past rather than as a functioning home or community. Beijing itself has continued with its rapid pace of construction development and more and more migrants reach the city each year. Though the film is ten years old, the themes presented are still relevant.

### 03) Biography of director Wang Xiaoshuai

Chinese Film director, Wang Xiaoshuai, was born January 1, 1966 during the Cultural Revolution. His parents moved from Shanghai to Guiyang when Wang was two months old. Guiyang is a small town located in the mountains. Most of the residents of Guiyang come from neighboring Sichuan Province. When Wang was a child, he studied painting. He also watched many old revolutionary films, such as *Dong Cunrui* (1955) by Guo Wei and *The Twinkling Red Star* (1974) by Li Jun and Li Ang.

When Wang turned thirteen, he and his family moved to Wuhan, a bustling metropolis known for its sizeable "floating population." So the depiction of city residents vs. peasant migrants in *Beijing Bicycle* is an experience that Wang knew first-hand.

In 1981, Wang enrolled in the high school affiliated to the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, with then intention of becoming a painter. However, the early 1980s marked a revival of China's film industry and Wang decided to pursue a directing career at the Beijing Film Academy.

The film academy exposed Wang to a variety of film and filmmakers that were to have a great influence on his work. Certainly the fifth generation film directors made a huge impact on the young film student. But Wang was just as entranced by foreign filmmakers such as Federico Fellini, Alain Resnais and Yasujiro Ozu.

Wang's unique vision and personal style is readily apparent in his early work, *The Days* (1993) to his most recent film, *Drifters* (2003). His films are notable for their beautifully composed scenes, and for showcasing characters, that though passive and disenfranchised, still fight to retain their dignity.

### Filmography

#### As Director:

*Drifters* (Er Di) (2003)

*After the War* (Jeon Jang Keu I Hu) (2001) a Korean project consisting of three short films, one directed by Wang.

*Beijing Bicycle* (Shiqi Sui De Danche) (2000)

*Suburban Dreams* (Menghuan Tianyuan) (2000) also known as *The House* or *Fantasy Garden*

*So Close to Paradise* (Biandan, Guniang) (1997) also known as *The Vietnamese Girl*

*Frozen* (Jidu Han Leng) (1995) released under the pseudonym Wu Ming (anonymous)

*Suicides* (Da Youxi) (1994)

*The Days* (Dongchun De Rizhi) (1993)

**As Actor:**

*Peering From the Moon* (Henry Chow, 1991)

*The Red Violin* (François Girard, 1998)

**04) Scene-by-scene guide to *Beijing Bicycle***

Start-1:42

Young, prospective delivery people (all are country people) are interviewed and cleaned up for delivery jobs in the city of Beijing.

1:43-2:55

Opening credits

2:56-4:46

New employees of Fei Da Express Delivery are cleaned up and given new bicycles. They are given instruction on how they are to conduct themselves as said employees and how they will be paid.

4:47-6:26

Guei goes out on his first day. He is happy as he pedals the streets of Beijing. He visits his relative who is impressed that he was hired and impressed at the bicycle he has been given the chance to earn.

6:27- 8:13

As they eat lunch, Guei and his relative spy on a young woman through a bedroom window as she changes into different clothes. They are amazed at how rich she is because she has so many clothes. The relative tells Guei that city folk are never happy, even with such a huge house. "She never smiles."

8:14-10:31

Guei goes back out, pedaling the streets of Beijing. He arrives at his first job in a large, intimidating building and parks his bicycle out front. He goes inside for the job.

10:32-13:39

Guei makes his first amount of money and records it in his notebook. Guei goes out on his next job. He continues recording the money he has made into his notebook. His relative asks him how long until the bike is his and he says, "Three days at most." He has been working about a month. The pretty woman comes walking down the street to purchase soy sauce from his relative's store. Guei sneaks looks at her as she walks back home.

13:40-14:32

Guei is at the business office of the delivery service to settle his account as, according to his records, he has paid off his bicycle. The woman behind the desk argues with him and says he still owes money. She and another woman keep saying it's only 70 yuan; he can make that in one day.

14:33-16:20

The bike is now Guei's so he marks it so that he can always tell which bicycle is his, even though he still has to work one more day for it. He sits with his relative and the relative explains how city

people always cheat you. But, he says, it's only one more day. Another piece of advice he gives Guei is to not let anyone know you're not from here (Beijing).

16:21-22:04

Shots of street life and lots of bicycles as Guei pulls up to park his bike and lock it. He goes into a "high class hotel" to make a pickup for a Mr. Zhang. The receptionist sends him to the shower area and he gets undressed as he is told and takes a shower. He is then led into a room with men getting massaged. It turns out this is the wrong Mr. Zhang and now Guei is being ordered to pay for the shower he unwillingly took. Guei tries running away but is apprehended. Eventually, the manager comes out and it is revealed that this is the Mr. Zhang.

22:04-23:58

Guei walks out of the hotel and loud drums are foremost in the diegetic soundtrack. There are dancers and general confusion. Guei walks to where his bicycle was and he realizes it is not there anymore. It has been stolen. He walks back and forth among the parked bicycles, desperately hoping his bicycle will appear.

23:58-25:42

Guei is seated on a curb in the dark by himself. He suddenly realizes he hasn't delivered Mr. Zhang's package and runs all the way to the delivery site. He arrives and the place is locked.

25:43-28:38

Guei is at the offices of the delivery company and the secretary is telling him to stop crying and that he is lucky the manager didn't fine him. He goes to speak to the manager who is on the phone. The manager agrees to hire him back if he can find his bicycle. The manager states, "If you can find that bike, your determination will get you another chance."

28:39-30:54

Shots of street life in Beijing. An ocean of bicycles. Long shots, close ups. Bicycles going left, going right. Bicycles carrying mattresses, refrigerators, and other large items. Guei is shown walking the streets looking for his bicycle. Bicycles are in each shot. All long shots. He does this until it is dark. He is shown at the end of the sequence in long shot standing behind hundreds of parked bicycles.

30:55-32:09

Opening shot is young adult boys riding around a construction site inside a building doing tricks on their bikes. It is obvious that one of the boys is on Guei's bike.

32:10-34:30

Jian's friend is asking him if his dad bought him the new bike. There is a group of young adults—the ones who were riding at the construction site—and they are dressed like prep school boys. They take off riding until Jian comes to a screeching halt. We soon see that a pretty young woman (also dressed in prep school uniform) is having bike trouble and Jian stops to help her. They then take off on a bike ride together slowly along a beautiful park until they finally say good-bye. It is apparent that they like each other, or at least Jian likes her and wants to impress her.

34:30-36:40

Jian rides his bike back along the route he and the girl took, only this time he is riding along with no hands on his handlebars, his jacket slung over his shoulder. He is happy and it shows in his riding style. Many close up shots of him as he rides. He finally makes it home and goes to park

his bicycle. He goes to great lengths to hide the bike and now we believe that he is the person who stole Guei's bike.

36:41-37:45

Inside Jian's house, we are introduced to his father and we learn that his father has promised him a bicycle, but Jian's sister has gotten into a very good middle school and they now have to use the money for her tuition. We learn that Jian is not a prep school boy, but is somewhat poor.

37:46-39:17

Inside Jian's bedroom, he wakes from sleep and gets out of bed. He sneaks outside to practice tricks on his bicycle. He tries not to make noise because he doesn't want his family to know he has the bicycle.

39:17-41:59

Quick cut from Jian on his bicycle to Guei and his relative sitting outside in the dark. Guei has been looking for his bicycle all day and will not go inside. His relative tells him he is stubborn and that he is leaving (on bicycle). Guei sits on the curb, small in the frame on the right side. Next shot he is walking slowly and continuing his search up and down the rows of parked bicycles. As he is examining the bikes for his mark, he knocks one down and hears someone coming so he tries to run, but is caught.

41:59-42:43

He is gotten out of jail by his former boss who says he cannot believe that Guei got caught stealing a bike and that he also cannot believe all this fuss over a bicycle. He tells Guei not to bother him again; he is no longer part of the company. He drives away.

42:44-43:34

Cut to Jian and his girlfriend riding their bikes. Cut to Guei's relative squatting outside his store smoking a cigarette. Guei's bike looms in the foreground as the relative eyes it, slowly recognizing the bike. We hear Jian off screen talking to someone on the phone. Jian pays the relative for the use of the phone and they leave. Guei's relative gets up quickly and runs into his store.

43:34-48:24

Jian and his girlfriend are sitting next to a lake with their bicycles parked in front of them. The camera is behind them. The girlfriend gets up and walks away, calling Jian to follow her. They both look up at the sky silently and Jian wants to touch the girl or kiss her, but doesn't. He then notices Guei looking at his bicycle, which is parked in its original spot. A chase ensues. Jian leaves the girl as he runs after Guei on the bicycle. Guei doesn't pay attention and smashes into a truck. Jian is then able to catch him. Guei has landed in the back of the truck that is loaded with bags of flour and when he gets up, his face is comically covered in white. He picks up the bike and begins to walk away, humiliated. The humiliation continues when Jian attacks him and accuses him of stealing the bike. Jian's friends appear and begin to call him a bicycle thief. They start to push him around and try to take the bike, but Guei won't let go. Finally, they wrest the bike from him and kick him and walk away with the bike.

48:24-50:10

Jian and his friends play Dance Dance Revolution at a local game room. The girlfriend comes in and tries to get Jian out of there, but he won't leave. When his friend says there are no more tokens he tells his friends to buy more because he is always paying (which is interesting because his family does not appear to have expendable income). He goes to purchase more tokens to play

as the girlfriend leaves. Jian returns to the game and discovers she is gone so he leaves to go look for her. Meanwhile, Guei appears in a window, looking for his bike.

50:10-54:55

Jian returns home and hides his bicycle. Guei has followed him home and appears in the background as Jian walks away. Jian goes to his home and sees his sister. She seems to know he has the bike and walks away from him silently. When he gets inside, he discovers his father cannot find the money he has set aside for Jian's sister's school. His father asks Jian if he took the money and Jian replies no. He heads to his room and on the way sees his stepmother and half-sister and they don't speak to each other. He goes out onto the roof of his home by himself.

54:56-57:05

Guei is briefly seen in a very dark setting in the bicycle garage. Next shot is the camera following Jian to the bicycle garage where he has his hiding spot. We see what a winding little community it is in the hutong. He finally makes it to his hiding spot and discovers the bicycle is missing. He looks everywhere in a panic and turns toward the camera. A shot of his sister is shown and it is obvious she knows what is missing and where the money for her tuition went.

57:06-57:48

Guei is lying on the sidewalk holding his bicycle. Off screen we hear, "I'll be damned! Unbelievable!" Cut to a shot of the manager surrounded by the office women who have been putting Guei down since he started working. The manager comments on him, "You country folk! A real 'little engine that could'" and tells him he can have his job back.

57:48-59:56

Cut to Jian standing at a window while his friends try to get him to leave with them, but he no longer has a bicycle so he doesn't want to go with them. Xiao comes into the picture and also tries to get him to go with her, but he won't. She says, "Don't be so upset. It's only a bike. You can always buy a new one."

59:57-1:02:49

Guei rides his bike down the street, dressed in his work clothes. He looks happy as he pedals around the city of Beijing, riding through the hutongs until he turns a corner and crashes into the woman from the window. She has been knocked out and Guei and his relative bring her into the store so she can recover. She gets up and stuffs a huge duffle bag with clothes, puts on her shoes and walks out silently. Guei and the relative stare after her until the relative says she's out of our league.

1:02:49-1:05:42

Shot of a bicycle with a person on it doing tricks. We do not see the person's face yet. Eventually it is revealed that he is the local cool bicycle trick guy that all of the others admire. There is a crowd watching him, including Xiao and even Jian. Jian notices that Xiao is enthralled with him and his is jealous. Jian and one of his buddies pick a fight with each other. The friend is saying that Jian stole the bike. The other friends break up the fight. Xiao is seen leaving with the cool bicycle trick guy. The buddies then sit and begin to discuss a plan on how to get Jian's bike back. One of the buddies recognized the name of the delivery service as "Fei Da."

1:05:43-1:07:50

Cut to Guei riding his bicycle, working. Cut to Jian and his buddies waiting at "Fei Da" for Guei to return from his deliveries. Guei sees them upon his return and jumps back on to his bike and tries to ride away. A huge chase ensues with the buddies chasing after Guei and cornering him

into a construction site or empty building area. They knock him off his bike and begin to mercilessly beat him. Guei gets back onto his bike and takes off again. Again he is caught and they continue to beat him. All done in very extreme long shot. The beginning of the fight takes place very small on the screen, but then cuts to a closeup of the fight which is very jarring to the viewer. They ride away and Guei is left on the ground—we see him very small on the screen as it is another long shot.

1:07:51-1:12:29

The gang of prep school boys watches something we soon discover is an altercation between Jian and Xiao. He has his bike back and wants her back as well. All is done in long shot. The boys try to tell Jian everything will be okay as they ride up to Jian's garage where he hides his bicycle. Jian looks at something and we cut to his father who is in the garage looking for something. Guei and the little sister are there as well. Jian jumps off his bike, clearly not expecting his father to be there. Guei points out the mark on his bike to the father while Jian looks on. The father is convinced and slaps Jian. This leads to a large argument between Jian and his father. They scream at each other as Guei looks on. This is where it comes out that Jian stole the money for his bike from his father. Jian's father hits him again. Jian's father gives Guei his bicycle back as Jian screams and struggles with his father. Guei rides away. The friends look on.

1:12:29-1:13:55

Jian sits by himself on the rooftop and is crying. His sister comes out. This is the first time they speak. She says, "My mother and your father say it's their fault." She tries to make peace between them. Jian ignores her and walks away.

1:13:55-1:14:53

The buddies again sit around and scheme as to how to get the bike back. The biggest of the bunch tells Jian, "Just one word from you and we go after him. We'll get your bike back."

1:14:53-1:18:48

Medium shots of the prep school gang cut with a medium shot of Guei. We know he is surrounded. They are in the abandoned work site again where they do their trick riding. They ask him whose bike it is and he continually states that it is his bike. They threaten him and he continues to say it is his bike. Jian stands in the background. They keep hitting his head and explaining that it isn't his bike anymore. They again try to get the bike away from him until Jian steps in and says he paid 500 yuan for the bike and it's his. They pull Guei and try to get the bike away from him but he won't let go. They let go when he begins screaming at the top of his lungs.

1:18:48-1:22:38

It is now dark and they are still in the same spot. Guei still won't let go of the bike. The big guy says Guei can have the bike if he pays Jian 500 yuan for it. Guei says, "But I've already paid for it." They try haggling with him but he still won't give in. Time goes by and they are still in the same spot. They are getting ready to give up until the big guy comes up with another idea—Guei and Jian are going to swap the bike every other day and share it.

1:22:39-1:25:28

Guei and his relative eat lunch sitting in the shop. The relative is discussing the "deal." He walks away for a moment and the girl from the window walks in looking for something. Guei sits and stares at her. She cannot find what she is looking for and says nothing, just continues to look, bumping into Guei but not speaking. A car drives up in the background. A girl says to her mother, "Look, Mom! It's like I told you!" The mother says, "Qin, what are you doing here?" The woman and her daughter are very obviously upper class as Qin runs out of the shop and stands with her

head down in front of the mother. She picks up a bag and walks away quickly. The mother and daughter get into the car and drive away.

1:25:29-1:29:53

Guei's relative offers his own bicycle for Guei on the days he does not have his regular bike. He explains it is not perfect and "you've gotta pedal hard." The next shot is Guei struggling to ride his relative's bicycle on the street with hundred's of other bicyclists. His chain falls off as does the seat. He struggles to put the chain back on as the seat falls off again. Sweat pours down his face and he becomes frustrated. He leaves the bike on the side of the road as he runs away. It is decided he will run to make his deliveries. As the sun is going down, he meets Jian for the bicycle exchange. Their exchanges are wordless as they check out the bicycle out for any problems upon exchange. The exchanges are wordless until 1:29:36 when Jian asks Guei for his name.

FADE OUT

1:29:56-1:31:29

FADE IN. Guei and his relative sit in the store and the relative says, "I would have never guessed she was a maid." They are talking about the young woman they used to watch changing her clothes in the window. When Guei asks what happened to her, his relative says, "She used to wear her boss's high-heeled shoes." And she sold them sometimes. Fired. Disappeared.

1:31:30-1:35:09

Xiao comes out of her home with her bicycle in the pouring rain. She begins to ride and runs into Jian (who cuts her off and won't let her go any further). Jian rides his bicycle in circles around her. Until eventually he stops and she rides off. To meet the cool bicycle trick guy. Close ups of Jian are juxtaposed by long shots of the new couple. The cool guy rides up (with an umbrella so he isn't soaked like Jian) and puts a cigarette in his mouth, asking Jian for a light which Jian can't supply. Cool guy supplies his own light (with sunglasses on in the rain). He gives Jian the cigarette and rides away, humiliating Jian in front of Xiao.

1:35:09-1:36:54

The scene opens with Jian at his bicycle exchange meeting place, waiting, until Xiao and the Cool Guy ride by and Jian takes off after them. The scene cuts between Jian and the couple, sometimes with Jian shown in the background or foreground with the couple in the opposite area of the frame. Meanwhile, Guei is shown waiting at the exchange site for Jian to show up with the bicycle.

1:36:54-1:39:34

Xiao and the Cool Guy are shown in the far end of the frame and Jian appears in close up from behind on his bicycle. He is stalking the couple. He picks something up and the camera does a rack focus on what is now in his hand: a brick. He begins to ride after the couple. They all ride slowly and the non-diegetic music helps to increase tension. Again, Guei is shown still at the exchange site and he is now playing with a little boy. Jian and the couple continue their ride around the maze of the hutong. Off screen we hear, "You bastard!" and a thump, which we assume is the brick hitting the Cool Guy on the head. We see the reaction of two elderly people sitting in the hutong in a long shot. The next shot is from closer to the action—we see the elderly couple now from down the "street" that Jian and the couple went down, as well as others who have witnessed the brick to the head. Next we see the Cool Guy on the ground with Jian and Xiao standing above him (in long shot). Jian rides away slowly. The Cool Guy sits up and assesses the damage to his head.



1:39:34-end

Opening shot is Guei standing on the left hand side of the screen at the exchange site. Jian comes pedaling into the frame for the exchange. He offers Guei a cigarette and tells Guei to keep the bike and don't bother bringing it back. He knows he is in big trouble. Suddenly, other bicyclists show up in the frame screaming, "There he is!" It is the Cool Guy and his gang. They take off after Jian. Guei is riding his bike behind Jian. Jian asks why Guei is following him. Guei splinters off and rides away. The gang splits and some go after Guei and some go after Jian. Eventually, Jian and Guei meet up again. Jian says, "Are you stupid?" Guei replies, "I don't know the way out!" Eventually, they reach a dead end. The suspenseful non-diegetic music stops and it is silent. They've been caught. Jian tells Guei to get out of here, but the gang won't let him go. We keep hearing Guei off screen saying, "I didn't do anything! Why me?" The only other noise we hear is the beatings they are receiving and one of the gang members breaking Guei's bike. Guei keeps repeating, "I didn't do anything! Give me back my bicycle!" His bicycle is destroyed. As the hoodlum is kicking the bike, Guei walks up behind him and smashes his head with a brick. Jian wakes up and tries walking over to Guei who is lying on his bicycle. Guei gets up, looks at Jian, picks up his bicycle, and limps away. The last shots are in slow motion with Guei carrying his bicycle through the streets of Beijing. We hear the non-diegetic music and the honking of horns and squealing of brakes.

The story takes place in Beijing, which is located in the northeastern part of China, about a hundred miles inland from the coast. We never find out where our hero is from, Guei, but we do know he is a migrant and has come from the countryside to work in Beijing, a city of almost 20 million people.

## **05) Lesson Plan 01 (by Jian Guo)**

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject: Chinese Literature

Goals:

1. To help students think and understand the characterization of Gui and Jian.
2. To help students understand Chinese society in ways like urbanization, social polarization, migrant workers, etc.
3. To help students develop creative writing skills.

Set up:

1. Provide historical background (2 minutes; including China's reform and opening up, urbanization and migrant workers).
2. Ask questions about their feelings when they first visited big cities which they are not familiar with (3 minutes to 5 minutes).

Procedure:

Set up and Show film (first part; 35 minutes; ends at Jian's bringing the bike back and hiding it)

(First class ends)

Show film (second part; 40-45 minutes; ends at Gui's struggle with Jian and Jian's friends, but before they reach an agreement of sharing the bike)

(Second class ends)

Homework: creative writing predicting the end of the film, or creative writing that develops the film (or other topics as listed below).

Third class and fourth class (sharing and discussion of students' creative writing pieces, then finish the film--35 minutes; discussion)

Discussion questions:

1. How do you like the ending?
2. What are the characteristics exhibited in Gui and Jian? How do you see that? And your comments?
3. What's Beijing like in this film?
4. What does the bicycle mean to them?

Other creative writing topics:

1. Choose a scene and write a diary article for one of the characters.
2. Write an imaginative story about the future life of Gui or Jian, say, after 5 or 10 years.
3. What's your "bicycle"? Write a story about one thing that used to mean a lot to you, but gradually faded away from the center of your life.
4. Write an essay, poem or a piece of fiction about youth and growing up.

## 06) Lesson Plan 02 (by Kevin Hurley)

### OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will explore how China's rapid rise as a force in the global economy has affected Chinese culture, society and the individual. Students will first discuss the impact of a massive migration from rural to urban areas. Students will then watch film clips that show how this migration takes place and the challenges that come with it. Finally, students will consider future economic, social, and political challenges meaning behind this large migration.

The video clips used in this lesson are from the films *China Blue*, *Beijing Bicycle*, and *Last Train Home*, which are documentary films dealing directly with rural villagers moving to large cities to find work and increase their income. Please note that these films are in Chinese with English subtitles.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Interpret the meanings of several Confucian teachings seen in the films.

- Discuss how traditional Chinese family life is being challenged by the circumstances of migrant workers.
- Determine basic market forces in China that are causing this migration.
- Understand China's role in a wider global context
- Explain the implications of such a large migration for the future of China and the world.

## GRADE LEVELS

9-12

## SUBJECT AREAS

Sociology, [Economics](#), [Geography](#), [International Studies](#), [Social Studies](#), [World History](#), [Current Events](#)

## MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video and maps and to display charts
- A world map and a political map of China
- Chart: "Confucianism and Filial Piety" (PDF file)
- Teacher's version: "Confucianism and Filial Piety"
- Article from National Geographic  
<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/05/china/whats-next/hessler-text>
- Video from Youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNXg-kYk-LU&feature=related>
- Copies of Last Train Home, Beijing Bicycle, and China Blue

## ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

Two 50-minute class periods, plus time outside of class to complete a short essay

### Lesson Discussion Starter:

Use a world map to point out where China is located. Explain that the traditional family in China is changing with the country's rapid industrialization. Today, China has more than 130 million workers who migrate to jobs in urban areas so they can support their families back home, they are termed the 'Floating Population'. Tell students that they are going to watch a series of video clips that show the circumstances of people whose stories are representative of millions of others. First, watch this clip

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNXg-kYk-LU&feature=related>

Then follow the guided questions or come up with a list of your own. These questions can be revisited after viewing each group of clips.

1. With so many people moving to the cities, what kind of social imbalances do you think are occurring?
2. What is likely to be the economic cause and affect of China's rapid industrialization and huge floating population?
3. What kind of divisions can you envision in a society of such rapid growth?
4. With rapid industrialization, what kinds of things do you think the Chinese are gaining and losing in the process?
5. How can China better balance economic development with the needs of its people?

## FILM CLIPS

### From Last Train Home: Total time 11 minutes

[Clip 1: "The World's Largest Human Migration" \(length 7:38\)](#)

This clip begins at 1:00 with people running through a tunnel and on-screen text that reads,

"There are over 130 million migrant workers in China." It ends at 8:38 with the statement "We don't even know what to say to the kids."

[Clip 2: "We Work Far Away From Home" \(length 0:40\)](#) This clip begins at 55:40 when a man on the train says, "The train is just too slow." It ends at 56:20 with the line "Life would be pointless."

[Clip 3: "A Mother Leaves Her Child For Work in the City" \(length 1:10\)](#) The clip begins at 14:40 with the statement "We were very poor when we left home in the '90s." It ends at 15:50 with the line "Otherwise, I couldn't eat anything."

[Clip 4: "How Can There Be Any Feelings?" \(length 0:31\)](#) This clip begins at 34:15 with a close-up shot of Qin, the daughter. It ends at 34:46 after Qin says, "All they care about is money."

**From China Blue:** total time approximately 29 minutes

Clip 1: 1:00 to 12:20 an introduction to story and characters. (11:20 total)

Clip 2: 27:50 to 35:55 dealing with foreign business partners and paying employees. (12:05 total)

Clip 3: 40:55 46:20 strike and loss of wages (5:25 total)

**From Beijing Bicycle: Total time approximately 26 minutes.**

[http://merchant.videotex.net/uploads/news/Beijing\\_Bicycle\\_-\\_Teacher\\_s\\_Guide.pdf](http://merchant.videotex.net/uploads/news/Beijing_Bicycle_-_Teacher_s_Guide.pdf)

11 seconds to 7:48 (total 7:37) first scenes at company and looking at the girl in the window

12:45 to 13:50 (total 1:05) scene of arguing over the bike being fully paid for or not.

25:10 to 34:00 (total 8:50) scene of trying to convince boss to give him his job back and the city boy enjoying the bike around Beijing.

49:05 to 52:10 (total 3:05) Father is looking for the money

103:15 to 109:15 (total 6:00) boys steal the bike back and the confrontation with the father.

### **Wrap-Up ACTIVITY:**

Read the article from National Geographic and write a predictive paper

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/05/china/whats-next/hessler-text/2>

### **Additional Resources:**

<http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/guides/chinaguide.pdf>

a great guide to China Blue, this raises many other pertinent points and discussion questions

<http://www.aems.illinois.edu/resources/currentevents/chinamanufacturing.html>

Lots of resources from this site on all aspects of China

## **07) Lesson Plan 03 (by Larry Hoffner)**

### CREATIVE

- Continue the story with Jian and Guei. The continuation could be immediate or there could be a time-lapse. These characters are boys; what kind of men will they become? Imagine if they met years later and reminisced about the bicycle incident which was a defining moment in their respective lives?
- The respective characters could write a journal about their bicycle experiences and what they learned from them.

- The “girl in the window” (Qin) proves to be someone she isn’t. Imagine the film being told from her perspective. This could be a before-during-after structure.
- Imagine if the boys met again five years from the bicycle incident and the “girl in the window” re-enters their lives and becomes the new ‘object’ of their desires?

### RESEARCH

- A formal research project examining the historical and contemporary value of bicycles in Chinese culture.
- The students could write a straight forward film review whereby they examine the cinematic, political, and economic elements of the film. After they have written their review, they are to select three formal reviews that could easily be located at [www.mrqe.com](http://www.mrqe.com). The students will then react/respond to the respective reviews as they integrate/synthesize the material into their research. Another version of this exercise would be to give the students three diverse reviews and have them integrate them into a formal research project.
- The students will compare and contrast DeSica’s *The Bicycle Thieves* to Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Beijing Bicycle* making specific references to the context of when the respective films were made.

### CRITICAL/REFLECTIVE THINKING

- What moral dilemma does the bicycle pose for the respective teenagers?
- What does the bicycle mean for both Guei and Jian?
- Why does Jian tell Guei to keep the bike? How have each of these characters changed?

### SCENES

- The opening scene where the disheveled and unkempt boys are interviewed is immediately contrasted with the same boys in uniform with their new mountain bikes. This visual transformation is forecasting the psychological challenge and transformation the young men will face as they move from the rural to the urban.
- When Guei, the messenger, is mistakenly led to the showers when he is on a delivery, humorously shows the difficulty and the challenges he faces in understanding a ‘foreign’ culture. It could be compared to the excellent immigration film *El Norte* by Gregory Nava where Guatemalan immigrants illegally cross the border into California. The difficulty of adjusting to that which is ‘foreign’ is most prominent.
- The scene where Guei holds onto the bike and gives a primal scream while surrounded by a gang of hostile boys says (or shows) the psychological importance given to the bike.
- When Jian asks Guei what his name is and extends his hand is most revealing as a strange bond is established between adversaries.

## **08) Lesson Plan 04 (by Melisa Holden)**

Essential Questions:

- How do filmmakers portray downtrodden characters or outsiders in a film in their use of shot types?
- How are working class people portrayed?
- How is editing used to depict sadness and defeat? How is editing used to increase tension?

#### Common Core Learning Standards

- Literature 1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- Literature 11: Interpret, analyze, and evaluate narratives, poetry, and drama, aesthetically and philosophically by making connections to: other texts, ideas, cultural perspectives, eras, personal events, and situations.
  - a. Self-select text to respond and develop innovative perspectives.
  - b. Establish and use criteria to classify, select, and evaluate texts to make informed judgments about the quality of the pieces.

#### Films: *Beijing Bicycle* and *Il Ladri di Biciclete*

- Watch the opening of each film (i.e. first 5 minutes or so) and discuss, cinematically, how the each director sets up our protagonist—how does the director present to us the socioeconomic strata in which they live? You may discuss camera movement, shot types, and/or different aspects of mise en scene. Choose three cinematic pieces and discuss in 500 words.
- Read the following essay (<http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Independent-Film-Road-Movies/Neorealism-HISTORICAL-ORIGINS-OF-ITALIAN-NEOREALISM.html>). Discuss ways in which DeSica and the Italians changed cinema after WWII and the reign of dictator Mussolini. Also discuss Wang Xiaoshuai and the 6<sup>th</sup> generation filmmakers in a post-Mao China. What are some cinematic differences in their filmmaking styles? What are their similarities? How does Marxism come into play in their films?
- Scene Redo: Choose a 1-2 minute scene in each film. Re-create the scenes yourself. Storyboard and shot lists are required. In your journal, describe differences you found between the filmmaking styles of DeSica and Wang.