Issue #12

What Hollywood gets wrong about the #METOO movement
Content warning: this piece mentions sensitive topics surrounding sexual assault and violence against women.

The docuseries “Allen v.s. Farrow” is a tell-all from Dylan Farrow, Woody Allen’s adopted daughter with Mia Farrow, where she reveals being sexually abused by Allen as a child. I won’t lie, I get intrigued by a prominent celebrity’s ousting just as much as the next person, but I can’t help but feel, the recent documentaries meant to lift the curtain on sexual abuse in the entertainment industry have felt hollow and devoid of any larger message. And I think it’s on purpose.

The scene opens up on Mia Farrow’s house in the Connecticut countryside. The New England home looks like something out of the parent trap. Dylan Farrow sits inside a room adorned with a fireplace and photo albums and keepsakes that sit on a pile on the floor. She begins to talk about how she had a dream childhood in many ways: she had the company of several siblings and was whisked off to dream vacations. It was not until much later that she would come forward about what had happened in that home during the summer.

Allen became a household name in television in the early 1970s with films with eclectic plots but relatable characters. He dominated the romantic comedy genre for decades and his films were nominated and won awards. What drew people to Allen’s films was his shameless showcase of human vulnerabilities that the audience could relate to. In his films, he did not portray himself as what some might have imagined the director of best selling movies might be like—handsome, arrogant, aloof and detached from the anxieties and inconveniences that everyday people are subject to. Many times he played an awkward and socially anxious character that showed him as vulnerable and imperfect that made his audiences more enamored by him.
In almost every one of Allen’s hit films was a love interest between an older man and a much younger woman. Allen’s film “Manhattan” (1991) was nominated for best picture. The plot of the movie revolves around a relationship between Allen and a 17 year old girl. In the movie, the 17 year old is hopelessly in love with Allen and he often recites lines urging her to go for boys her own age. He puts himself in the passive position as if he has no role or agency in the relationship he is in with a younger woman.

The #METOO movement has prompted a lot of us to look back at older films that may have once been brushed off as a product of its time. The movement has garnered new attention to ways rape culture was perpetuated in film that may have gone under the radar. I was pretty shocked myself to find out a film about a relationship between a grown man and a minor was nominated best picture less than 30 years ago.
with 'Woody' as the only male father figure in the children's lives. She noticed that Allen had taken a particular liking to Dylan and would want to spend more time with Dylan than any of the other kids. Mia Farrow became suspicious of Woody's infatuation with her daughter but did not think anything more sinister was happening outside of her view. The accusations of Allen are not news, they first came out in the early 90s when Dylan's psychologist was required to send out a police report after hearing accusations that Allen had touched her inappropriately.

Despite the exposure and media coverage of abusive men, these documentaries may do more to protect men than serve survivors. I have noticed, despite the attention given to stories of the abuse, the perpetrators that are reported on still fall into the "bad man" category. Allen is extremely rich and powerful and had a huge influence on culture and the entertainment industry. On the other end of the spectrum, we have people like Ted Bundy who is described as "odd" and mentally unstable. By these two depictions of abusers, it leaves out the majority of perpetrators that are more or less "normal" or may even be perceived by others as a "good guy." Hollywood has strategically found a way to sensationalize women's experiences without adding anything to the conversation.

These documentaries create the illusion of a reckoning with violence against women and a culture that perpetuates misogyny and abuse, but fail to provoke men to think deeper about their own actions and behaviors. By writing off the abusers as mentally unstable or in a position where moral ineptitude is expected, it has already excused those who do not identify with either extreme. Therefore assuming that men with abusive behaviors are the minority when really they are the majority. Women, POC and LGBTQ+ communities are constantly being harassed, alienated and objectified by men that have social skills, friends and jobs and wouldn't stand out as having unsettling or uncommon behavior. If the only media attention and reporting is given to high profiles or social outcasts Hollywood might as well be saying “not all men”.
Nicole Steinberg, Staff Writer, Op-Ed

Nicole Steinberg is a Political Science and International Political Economy double major at the University of Puget Sound. Among other things, Nicole enjoys writing about international current events and covering local news. She writes from Tacoma, WA but is originally from the San Francisco Bay Area. After graduation this spring, she hopes to travel and write for an international news publication.

Graduation - is this a good idea?

3/26/2021  0 Comments

Written by Anny Schmidt, Staff Writer, Op-Ed

On March 12 the school sent out an email to all graduating seniors regarding Commencement and what to expect on the day. While it was no surprise that we seniors would be having some sort of graduation, the email also entailed that there would be a graduation for the class of 2020 as well—all in-person if things remain as they are currently. While in-person graduation is not set in stone currently, it is something that the school is currently planning to hold.

The idea of having graduation in-person in the first place is questionable. I must say that I really want an in-person graduation, but I don't want to die from Covid and I don't want my fellow seniors or their family members to die either. Having an in-person graduation alone for one class is questionable enough, but when the email was released that said that both the class of 2020 and the class of 2021 would have graduation ceremonies on the same day I was seriously worried. How is the school going to keep everyone safe if there are hundreds of people roaming about? I wouldn't be quite as worried if they had said that they would have one graduation ceremony one day and then the next ceremony the next day, but having them on the same day seems extreme. How will they sanitize everything? Members who have to attend both want to stick around on campus.
I would love to have a graduation ceremony in-person. As someone who has never worn a cap and gown, I was really looking forward to this year’s graduation. I had a vision that I would have my whole family come to the graduation, and that I would get to show my nieces and nephews around the campus. I was excited to show my brothers the campus they had never seen before and to share all my wonderful memories with them. When the pandemic hit those dreams were shattered. I am still excited about wearing a cap and gown despite being nervous about actually attending an in-person graduation, however much I may want one. To top that off, we are only allowed to have two guests.

In the grand scheme of things two guests seems pretty generous, but then I think about the students who have divorced parents, or were raised by another family member. What about them? What about the students who have parents or family members who are high risk? Are they really going to want to attend this ceremony? What about families who have younger siblings and children who can’t be left at home alone? Are they really going to want to leave them at home? It feels like the school isn’t taking into account any of these scenarios.

These are all speculations I am making about graduation if graduation is even held in-person.

While that is the plan right now things can change, the pandemic can spike, people can get stupid and go out and spread the disease around. I really don’t want to have my college graduation be me sitting at home like I’ve been doing for a year now, staring at my computer screen while someone speaks to me over Zoom. I really don’t want to have to think about having to arrange my schedule to possibly return next year to attend my graduation ceremony a year later than planned just because of Covid-19. I don’t want people to get sick or be at risk during graduation, but I really want an in-person graduation. I’m sure I’m not alone in these sentiments.
Searching in America for Chinese Cinema

3/26/2021 0 Comments

Written by Logan Canada-Johnson, Staff Writer, Film Analyst

“We live in a box of space and time. Movies are windows in its walls. They allow us to enter other minds, not simply in the sense of identifying with the characters, although that is an important part of it, but by seeing the world as another person sees it.” — Roger Ebert

Where is Chinese Cinema?

If I were to ask you what the last Chinese film you watched was, I estimate that it would take you a long while before you could produce an answer. Despite its superpower status in the global political economy, China is a
growing Chinese films since 2005 was less than one percent. Compare that to the United States, where two-thirds of total revenue comes internationally. China has become a lucrative market for Western films and was even projected by PricewaterhouseCooper to become the largest cinema market in the world by 2020. Yet, the only Chinese movies we are familiar with are usually martial arts films.

Where is Chinese cinema?

In order to answer the myriad of questions I had surrounding Chinese cinema, I turned to Assistant Professor of Asian Studies, Mengjun Li. Li herself was born and raised in China and immigrated to the U.S. for her professional degrees. She specializes in late imperial Chinese literature with a focus on vernacular fiction and performance texts, but also teaches a class on Chinese cinema.

A Brief History of China’s Film Industry

Much like the United States, China experienced a cultural golden age in the 1930s, including in the film industry. While there was mass censorship from the nationalist government at this time, filmmakers managed to utilize film to interrogate political ideologies and imagine a more equitable society. The preeminent film star of the age, Ruan Lingyu, gave women a strong voice. According to Noah Cowan of the British Film Institute, her work was a cornerstone of Chinese cinema.
In the aftermath of both the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Second World War (1939-1945), China was bruised and battered. Having lost massive pockets of land, resources and nearly 20 million people, films of the era became much more introspective. “Spring in a Small Town” (1948) by Fei Mu was the apotheosis of this Golden Age, a subtle and forlorn love story filmed in the remnants of a Chinese village.

The destabilization of Chinese society caused by these two wars created a vacuum of power, and thus a civil war. The Chinese Communist Party successfully defeated the Nationalist party and assumed authority over the government, marking the beginning of Mao Zedong’s rule. All private film studios were nationalized by 1952 and filmmakers became known as ‘cultural workers.’ Petty bourgeois aesthetics were cast aside in favor of Socialist Realism, a cinematic movement that aimed to capture the aesthetics of the working class’ struggle. “The Red Detachment of Women” (1961) by Xie Jin was an immensely popular film (even spawning a ballet) during this movement, although Xie would criticize this same government in his later films.
The ten ton hammer that was the Cultural Revolution dropped in 1966 and commenced a decade of political purging, factionalization and cultural erasure. Any person, place or artwork with traces of capitalism or the bourgeoisie was destroyed, lasting until Mao's death in 1976 and the arrest of his co-conspirators.

Thus began a period of political relaxation and ideological negotiation that fluctuates to this day.

**The Mass Appeal of Martial Arts**

The mainstays of Chinese films imported to the U.S. are predominantly Wuxia and Kung Fu films, both of the martial arts film genre. Wuxia, literally "martial arts" in Chinese, is a genre that exists both in the literary and film traditions.

According to Professor Li, the genre first appears in the 1920s based on popular folk tales, a "perfect combination of familiarity and excitement." She contextualizes them within the twentieth century as offering fantastical escape from "social chaos" and communal "self-reassurance" of values.

By reaffirming a shared set of values within the Wuxia film, it "strengthens the cathartic effect" of the film for the audience, Li says. The films are also a massive spectacle, of course. The genre literalizes the magic of these folk heroes and their adventures through breathtaking visual compositions and films like "A Touch of Zen" (1971),

"The Red Detachment of Women" by Xie Jin (1961)
own Wuxia movie, “Mulan” (2020).

Disney’s misappropriation of the Wuxia genre speaks to a larger issue of representation in media. Ignorant and misinformed nicknames for COVID-19 like “Kung-Flu” demonstrate that there is a strong stereotyping of Chinese people as martial artists. I asked Li what the effects on cultural perceptions of China could be when it primarily exports these martial arts films.

Li believes that while low-budget Kung-Fu flicks made in the 80s and 90s “might have created the stereotype that China only had cheap ‘chop-suey’ films to offer,” the commercial and critical success of directors John Woo, Ang Lee and Zhang Yimou in the US market is evidence that Wuxia films “can be artistically sophisticated while entertaining.” However, Li concedes that such limited subject matter may engender “narrow” perceptions of Chinese culture.
The most accomplished transnationalist Chinese filmmakers did not begin their most epic Wuxia or blockbuster action films, however. It all began in the art-house.

**China’s Room in the Art-House**

In post-Cultural Revolution China, the so-called “fifth generation” of Chinese filmmakers sought to legitimize Chinese cinema in the art-house film tradition. These filmmakers—namely Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige and Tian Zhuangzhuang—set out to emulate the techniques of European auteurs in search of the embrace of the festival crowd; they succeeded. “Red Sorghum” (1987) by Zhang Yimou became the first Chinese film to win the coveted Golden Bear award at the Berlin International Film Festival and Chen Kaige’s “Farewell My Concubine” (1993) became the first to win the Palme d’Or at Cannes. Zhuangzhuang’s “The Horse Thief” (1986) only sold seven copies upon its release in China, but became popular in the festival scene, so much so that Martin Scorsese awarded it his number one film of the 1990s even though it was technically released in the 80s!

As the fifth generation transitioned into the mainstream, new waves of Chinese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong filmmakers entered into the scene. These continued waves included Jia Zhangke, Wong Kar-Wai, Tsai Ming-Liang, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang and Wang Bing. The majority of these follow in the steps of the “slow cinema” film movement, a particular brand of cinema specializing in exploring and elongating time and space.
These auteurs are unwavering in their commitment to art-house traditions in form and content. The result is some of the richest and most human filmic texts in the canon of cinema. Li beautifully alludes to this in describing Jia Zhangke, her favorite director: “He looks at aspects and corners of the Chinese society that are often neglected. He forces the audience to be confronted with some of the bleakest realities in the society but he doesn’t pass easy judgement. He has a sense of humor, but he doesn’t ridicule. His style is calm and restrained, even when there are emotional torrents underneath.”

Art-house films are not always easy to watch; it’s why they get their own house. Unfortunately, it’s difficult for even American cinephiles to get their hands on these films. The Criterion Collection, the premiere distributor for restored editions of classic art-house films, only has films from Hong Kong and Taiwan, but those only account for 23 of the 1,083 works.

Li notes that the “classics have been restored in China but are not readily available in the U.S.”
Additionally, because American distributors were slow to recognize the appeal of many Chinese films, there were “probably problems in getting good quality prints from Chinese studios,” according to Li. Not to mention the ideological elephant in the room: the adversarial relationship between China and the U.S. This hostile relationship does not begin and end with political philosophies and trade, it extends into something as benign as getting a classic distributed in the West.

Geopolitics always get in the way of a good time.

**Where is Chinese Cinema? Redux**

Pinpointing why the proliferation of Chinese cinema is so disparate compared to other Eastern countries is a complex question. ChinaPower suggests that the stymie is a combination of assumed knowledge of Chinese history, language barriers and government censorship. Li acknowledges the “ideological restrictions” that factor into what gets produced in China, but contends that market pressures also dictate what culture is produced. She refers specifically to a spat between director Feng Xiaogang and internet users who lambasted his recent output. Feng rebuked his critics by asserting size because it has such trashy
Li also posits that mainland Chinese filmmakers were unconcerned with Western audiences prior to the Fifth Generation, which would explain why we don’t have access to most classics.

We, as Americans, must also recognize our role in othering China as a hostile entity whose culture can never comport with our own. Film is a site for learning, expression, and transcendence. Since I began my quest a year ago to watch every film classic, contemporary or vintage, I’ve begun to understand what constitutes citizenship and existence in each of the locations I visit. The bustling streets of Tehran, the birchwood forests of Western Russia, the volcanic-encrusted coast of Cape Verde, the arid countryside of northern China, I feel like a part of those places now live inside me.

I asked Li why she thinks it is important that we watch Chinese cinema and share it with the world. She simply stated, “for those who are interested in Chinese culture, cinema is a window to the different Chinese-speaking societies, their self-perceptions, and their views of the world.” Film allows us to cross the threshold for a moment in a time, to assume other dimensions of reality outside of the one we embody each day.

So, where do you want to go?

“The World” by Jia Zhangke

**Amendment to the article:**

While I refer to Chinese cinema as composed of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, I only do so in keeping with current film industry standards. Such reference does not reflect assent to the Chinese Trail. We recognize Taiwan,
This issue.

Logan Canada-Johnson, Staff Writer, Film Analyst

Logan Canada-Johnson is a Communication Studies and Philosophy double-major from the East Bay, California. He primarily writes about film releases and film culture, but is also interested in philosophy. He performs a number of other roles on campus, including Campus Films Programmer, President of UPS Film Club, officer in Sigma Alpha Epsilon, and debater in Ethics Bowl. He plans on obtaining a Doctorate in Cinema Studies after his Bachelors.

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