

Gina Marchetti\*

# Chinese Film Studies Online: Technological Innovations, Pedagogical Challenges, and Teaching Chinese-Language Cinema in the Digital Age

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jcfs-2021-0007>

Published online March 12, 2021

**Abstract:** Because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education, online initiatives have moved from the periphery to the very heart of teaching and learning across disciplines. However, the profession has just begun to consider the full impact these new technologies have on the way we research and teach Chinese-language cinema. Using the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) and University of Hong Kong Common Core campus-based course, *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens*, as my principal case study, I explore some of the ways in which the digital revolution has transformed research on and teaching about Hong Kong film. From surveying the types of material available for research to exploring the differences between MOOCs and flipped classrooms, this essay considers the positive implications and potential drawbacks of these new technologies in global, regional, and local educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), Hong Kong cinema, international education, pedagogical innovation, globalization

Digital technology has transformed the discipline of film studies in profound ways from the accessibility of DV cameras and online streaming to the quotidian use of scholarly search engines, video essays, and educational software. Because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education, online initiatives have moved from the periphery to the very heart of teaching and learning across disciplines. However, the profession has just begun to consider the full impact these new technologies have on the way we research and teach Chinese-language cinema. Using the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) and University of Hong Kong Common Core campus-based course, *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global*

---

\*Corresponding author: Gina Marchetti, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong,  
E-mail: marchett@hku.hk

*Lens* (Figure 1), as my principal case study, I explore some of the ways in which the digital revolution has transformed research on and teaching about Hong Kong film. From surveying the types of material available for research to exploring the differences between MOOCs and flipped classrooms, this essay considers the positive implications and potential drawbacks of these new technologies in global, regional, and local educational contexts.

## Chinese Film Studies Resources Online

On August 24, 2018, the website brainchild of cinema scholar Catherine Grant, *Film Studies For Free*, celebrated its 10th anniversary. Grant is Professor of Digital Media and Screen Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. A champion of the video essay that uses computer software, digitized motion pictures, and the YouTube platform to sample extant films as a form of critical reflection and commentary, Grant also hosts a site that provides links to freely available materials on film history, theory, and criticism. Paralleling the United Kingdom's push to make "open access" research journals the norm, Grant scours the Internet to highlight



**Figure 1:** Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens MOOC.

available scholarship on cinema beyond online paywalls. The search for “China” on the site in 2018 brings up material from the online journals *Screening the Past* and *Jump Cut* as well as a very useful bibliography of sources on Lou Ye. A “Hong Kong” search offers similar open-access articles as well as links to video essays on Wong Kar-wai by Elaine Castillo, Brian Hu, Vicky Thai, and Soraya Selene, and “Taiwan” includes a range of material on film festivals among other topics. Sites, such as Vimeo, host short motion pictures such as Kevin B. Lee’s 2015 video essay on Chinese film, 1949–1966. Of the free online publications spotlighted on Film Studies For Free, *Jump Cut*, in particular, has a long-standing commitment to scholarship on Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People’s Republic of China with many articles from their earlier print run available completely free online.

Many other Chinese film sites exist, but various restrictions are in place. For example, the Asian Film Archive has the following limitation on the use of materials it collects:

The Site is for your personal and non-commercial use. You may not modify, copy, distribute, transmit, display, revise, perform, reproduce, publish, license, deep-link, create derivative works from, transfer, or sell any information or content obtained from the Site unless expressly authorized by us.

Several databases specializing in Chinese-language film provide free access to data, including the Chinese Movie Database, Hong Kong Movie Database, Hong Kong Cinémagic, China Underground, Taiwan Film Database, and many others operated by archives in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. Film distributors, such as dGenerate, also maintain useful websites, although they do not provide free access to their films. Hands-down, Kirk A. Denton of Ohio State University hosts the most useful open-access bibliography on Chinese-language reference materials at Modern Chinese Literature and Culture (MCLC). While most of the books and periodicals listed cannot be accessed free of charge, the bibliography itself opens up a world of possibilities for those looking for English-language materials on Chinese cinema.

Specialized open access websites also provide valuable information for teachers, students, and researchers, including one that I maintain devoted to Hong Kong women filmmakers active since 1997, which also has an accompanying Facebook feed. Unfortunately, some sites have been taken down or archived, including the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded site devoted to Chinese film festivals previously maintained by Luke Robinson and Chris Berry. Since funding for the project was limited, Robinson and Berry decided to archive it on the open access academic digital publishing platform REFRAME (Research in Media, Film and Music). This example highlights the challenge of maintaining reference materials online. Whether open access or behind a paywall,

these databases and other resources must be updated and properly managed. Limitations on funding head the list of a number of problems plaguing the publication of film scholarship. Increasingly, academic publications slog at a frustratingly slow pace through backlogged and understaffed peer-reviewed journals, or they become available at vertiginous rates though less formal online publications including blogs, e-newsletters, listservs, as well as Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Curating these materials adds an additional layer of generally unpaid labor to the mix.

For Chinese film scholars, keeping current vies with fears of lack of access caused by the cost of subscribing to publications some institutions see as “niche” or of producing articles for journals that demand a fee from authors in exchange for open access. As open access initiatives make information more available, acquisition costs and fees for publication in open access journals price independent scholars and those working at institutions with smaller library budgets out of the academic marketplace. Open access journals that charge exorbitant fees potentially damage the field most cruelly by exclusively publishing research that can attract government or private subventions. In a field such as Chinese film studies with many unaffiliated, adjunct, independent scholars as well as stellar researchers working at community colleges and smaller institutions, the impact on the discipline could be disastrous.

## Teaching Chinese-Language Film Online

Online film education takes many forms, from informal instructional videos on platforms such as YouTube to complete Bachelor’s degree programs from institutions listed on the BestColleges website, for example, such as Arizona State University, Pennsylvania State University, and the University of Montana. Online courses in Chinese on Chinese-language and Asian cinema are now or have been offered previously through Nanchang, Beijing Normal, Northwest, and Wuhan universities, as well as Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan. However, to the best of my knowledge, Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens, is the only Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) devoted expressly to Chinese-language cinema currently available in English.<sup>1</sup>

While distance learning dates back to correspondence courses conducted through the postal service and public broadcasting offers educational opportunities through radio and televised lectures, MOOCs combine the open-university

---

<sup>1</sup> For information on the production of the MOOC and rationale behind choice of topics, assessments, and learning design, see Marchetti, Magnan-Park, and Ford (2017a).

model of no formal admissions requirements with tuition-free access to higher education. However, since machine and peer assessments make the “massive” enrollments possible, MOOC credentials cannot substitute for degrees from accredited institutions. MOOCs do open up many other avenues, however, that have been, in my opinion, seriously underutilized in teaching film.<sup>2</sup>

MOOCs in science, technology, business, and education dominate the field, media and film studies contribute a miniscule number of courses with Chinese film filling an even smaller niche. In the case of Hong Kong cinema, interest in the MOOC parallels the way the films function internationally, waxing and waning as “cult” cinema championed by committed fans, as arthouse cinema circulating among aficionados, or as popular commercial features extending periodically beyond the Asian region to occasional box-office success in the United States and Europe. As of 2018, Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens has been offered four times (February 2017, September 2017, January 2018, and September 2018).<sup>3</sup> The course’s enrollment has been far from “massive,” running between 1000 and 2800 online learners, which is miniscule in comparison with other MOOCs. The geographic spread, however, is more impressive. In the Fall 2018 offering, 71 countries/regions are represented, with some particularly enthusiastic learners from Latin America. Self-introductions on the interactive map (Figure 2) on the MOOC platform offer insight into what these international learners bring into the online classroom. A learner from Sahuayo, Michoacán, Mexico, for example states:<sup>4</sup>

Hong Kong cinema is quite different from [film in] my country ... it’s just captivating to me! I want to know how everything comes together to bring us the incredible films we all know; all the work behind each creative process, and, of course, how these films are capable of attaining such impact on foreign audiences~

Jhon from Dosquebradas, Risaralda, Colombia, shares:

I’m a bachelor of arts in communication and a beginner filmmaker ... Hong Kong cinema is so unique and I hope to broaden my knowledge about it (and also expand my watchlist).

His friend, Jonathan from Bogotá, Colombia, chimes in:

I studied Audiovisual Communication. I like Wong Kar-Wai’s films and fell in love with all the details in his films, so I decided to take this course because I want to know more about Hong Kong cinema, know other directors and expand my watchlist. Also, the reason why I joined to

---

2 For an overview of the current state of online higher education, see Maslen (2018).

3 The MOOC has been offered four more times since the date of this presentation: January 2019, September 2019, February 2020, and September 2020. It was archived in December 2020.

4 I have corrected some of the grammatical and other language errors in these quotations, but I have not changed the meaning of the posts.

this course was because a friend (Jhon) spoke to me about it. I hope to learn much and enjoy the experience.

Jéssica from Rio de Janeiro, State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, explains her interest in the course as follows:

I've always had a great interest in learning about other cultures through their cultural productions. Now, I'm trying to study further about it so I can make projects about the impact and relation of cultural productions on the international relationships of certain countries. I expect to learn about the Hong Kong cinema while learning how to better consume this content and therefore have a different view on something I like! I also hope to be able to show new stuff to my dad who is a huge fan of Hong Kong martial arts cinema since he was a kid!

Nicolas from Santiago Province, Santiago Metropolitan Region, Chile, introduces himself as follows:

... don't know much about filmmaking, but I'm a true fan of Hong Kong cinema trying to learn the essentials of martial arts choreography and storytelling from another perspective. This is to develop audio-visual projects faithfully recreating the true spirit of Hong Kong and its cinema.

In addition to informing all learners enrolled in the MOOC of the circulation of Hong Kong films in Central and South America, these introductions also provide information on the perception of Chinese-language cinema in that part of the world. Beyond the martial arts genre, learners mention Wong Kar-Wai and Fruit Chan. Also, several appear to be communication and filmmaking students interested in probing the techniques behind Hong Kong's distinctive fight choreography, storytelling, and cinematography. While some self-identify as "fans," they also have career ambitions in which a deeper knowledge of Hong Kong cinema is considered valuable. Jéssica's reference to her father, too, illustrates that the distribution of Hong Kong films in Brazil is not a new phenomenon, thus alerting her peers to the history of Hong Kong's reach into South American cinema.

Jhon continued to be an active contributor to the discussion forum, highlighting the comparisons between the depiction of Hong Kong and Colombia on Hollywood screens:

I also agree with Professor Marchetti: Globalization is more than Americanization. And like you said, "for most of the people movies are the means through which we learn about other cultures". Sadly, we think we're learning about other countries when a Hollywood picture is set outside USA, but in most cases, we're only watching the Americanized version of that country, filled with stereotypes.

An infamous example that I remember thinking about this is *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*. The movie opens with a scene in Bogotá, Colombia, and shows it like a tropical paradise. I'm from

Colombia, I lived in Bogotá, and in real life it's the total opposite of a tropical paradise. It's a cold, urban city with a pair of skyscrapers. Living in Colombia and watching that scene, makes it totally laughable. However, some foreigners could shape their vision of Bogotá as a jungle thanks to that movie. Although I gotta recognize Hollywood has changed in the last few years, there's still a long way to lessen the Americanization problem.

Fellow learners from other parts of Latin America concur. In response to another thread in the conversation, a learner identified as AnibalHM shares:

The same happens in Dominican Republic and parts of Latin America, but ... in the last decades this Americanization has been reduced. Now, there is more local cultural production in fields that were dominated by the USA: cinema, comics, videogames, TV series, etc.

Learners from other parts of the world also use their own location to provide insights for their online peers. For example, “katarinanik” shares the following in Unit 2 on Bruce Lee:

My country is located in Eastern Europe and kung fu films were extremely popular here. They appealed both to the white audiences and to the minority groups (Roma community in particular). I think it's because the first one identified with a non-American hero and the other one with the non-white hero, but mutual interest for action-based cinema was what attracted them in the first place.

This comment helpfully confirms Bruce Lee's global reach and offers an explanation for the star's appeal to specific audiences in Europe. Without their international peers, the handful of exchange students in the campus classroom (primarily from Asia and the United States) would speak for the world on the topic of Bruce Lee. The nuances of Hong Kong's film appeal in places such as Latin American and Eastern Europe would be lost.

Participation from online students from mainland China, however, does not stand out in the same way. This has been somewhat disappointing, since all the video lectures for the course include simplified Chinese character translations to address the needs of mainland students who may have difficulty following spoken English. Although learners must be able to tackle assessments and participate in discussions in English, the Chinese character transcriptions should give a needed boost to comprehension.

As our attention to the Chinese-speaking learner indicates, we feel it is vital for film studies MOOCs to use the ability of the online platform to break through language barriers experienced in traditional classroom settings in order to open up the field to voices from around the world. As Chinese-language cinema circulates widely, attracting interest as an art and an industry from academics as well as other professionals, courses such as *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens* offer a platform for learning about Chinese-language film and can serve as a conduit for interaction among teachers and students across institutions.

Although originally designed to showcase distinctive research and teaching at the University of Hong Kong in order to attract attention to our university's strengths, the pedagogical benefits of offering the MOOC to our campus students in order to enable them to interact with peers from around the world quickly became clear. All of our students in CCGL9001, a Common Core course in the Global Issues Area of Inquiry, which students can elect to take to fulfill university degree requirements, now also enroll in the edX MOOC. In fact, the MOOC, bearing the same course title as CCGL 9001 *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens*, was originally based on this Common Core course. As a result, it seemed natural to synchronize the courses so that international MOOC learners could interact on the discussion forum with local students.<sup>5</sup> As the active participation of students from Europe and Latin America indicates, a course such as this one can expand the discussion of Chinese-language film beyond the region and the occasional course taught in film or East Asia area studies programs elsewhere. Thus, rather than simply using online materials to “flip” a class by asking students to view lecture videos before class discussion, using the MOOC allows for an additional level of interaction that enables students to engage with peers from other parts of the world. Although the University of Hong Kong (HKU) has a robust exchange program with a wide network of other universities particularly in Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia, the open access nature of the MOOC exposes local students to non-traditional learners from countries as diverse as Brazil, Thailand, Russia, Serbia, and Nigeria.



**Figure 2:** Map with pins indicating location of learners. Each pin connects to a self-introduction.

<sup>5</sup> For more on how we used *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens* to internationalize our courses, see Marchetti, Magnan-Park, and Ford (2018).



Unfortunately, however, too few students opt to participate in online discussions. To remedy this, in the September 2018 offering of the course, we actively sought university partners, who agreed to require their students to do one unit of the MOOC at the same time our students covered identical material here in Hong Kong. We contacted roughly 30 colleagues whom we know to teach courses compatible with the material in *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens*. Even though many saw the value of this type of exchange, several factors acted as barriers, including mismatched semester dates, different approaches to the films covered, and sabbatical leaves.

Two colleagues from the United States did opt in. Frances Gateward of California State University—Northridge agreed to cover Mabel Cheung's *An Autumn's Tale* at the same time it appeared as Unit 3 on the MOOC platform and Staci Ford led the flipped class for the students at the University of Hong Kong. George Wang of the University of Hawaii—Manoa chose to require his students to do Unit 4 of the MOOC featuring Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park's presentation of John Woo's *The Killer* at the same time that I flipped the class for the on-campus students. Having specific academic partners engaging with their own students, HKU students, and online learners contributes to more stimulating and varied discussion for all involved. In addition, it brings George Wang's expertise as a filmmaker and Frances Gateward's considerable knowledge of women in film and critical race studies into the transdisciplinary mix we nurture as an integral part of both the online and campus versions of the course. However, two U.S.-based teachers are not enough, and we welcome the chance to partner with colleagues in China, Europe, Latin America, Africa, Oceania, as well as the rest of Asia. Ideally, a university partner on each continent would provide the MOOC and our local students with a genuinely "global lens" to focus on Hong Kong cinema's transnational influence.

Looking to the future, as these partnerships mature, we could also share student work. While the MOOC learners have the option to do two short peer-assessed essays as part of their coursework, our on-campus students have very different assessments. In addition to two in-class written assignments and a group report, the students work in teams to create a video essay using material from one of the films assigned on the syllabus. In these short videos, students demonstrate an understanding of a specific global concept using evidence from a Hong Kong motion picture. These video essays could be shared through an intercollegiate competition with our partners at other universities. The common ground of the MOOC provides a starting point for the exercise and enables students to share key terms and concepts to make the exchange more valuable. The essays, then, become part of the students' electronic portfolios demonstrating their

understanding of globalization, Hong Kong cinema, and film analysis. The projects also showcase their presentational skills involving speaking, writing, and visual design.

## The Misunderstood MOOC

While the value of MOOCs devoted to Chinese-language cinema in Chinese as well as English-language mediums seems self-evident, the barriers to expanding the offerings in Chinese film studies should not be minimized. The expense of producing quality learning materials keeps most small institutions and the scholars who work at them out of the game. The hope of open access to make higher education more widely available to underserved communities around the world tends to be offset by the fear that MOOCs provide a second-rate, isolated experience that may negatively impact calls for infusing local institutions with more government funding. However, any institution can only offer classes that meet the basic need to introduce the discipline and reflect the research interests and knowledge of its faculty. It seems inconceivable that other universities could offer quality courses that reflect the research culture of the University of Hong Kong, for example. Logically, institutions should produce MOOCs that showcase their research strengths and their local talents. In the case of *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens*, for example, not only does the MOOC draw on published scholarship by the key teachers as well as other members of the faculty such as film music specialist Giorgio Biancorosso, it also features local industry professionals including filmmakers Andrew Lau, Mabel Cheung, Alex Law, John Shum, and festival director Roger Garcia (Figure 3).

However, even though these courses are absolutely free and open without restriction for use by other educators, colleagues from other universities seem reluctant to include them as part of their curriculum. A world cinema course, for instance, could draw on materials from MOOCs produced in Hong Kong, Japan, Scandinavia, or the United States, to name a few places that have MOOCs devoted to their film cultures available in English. Unfortunately, it seems that this has yet to happen. A course entitled “Film Studies for Free” could, conceivably collate the best from online courses, publications, and video essays in order to create a dynamic, globally informed experience for students.

Some misconceptions and other actual problems prevent this from becoming a routine part of our film studies pedagogy. Misconceptions include:

1. Belief the use of materials in MOOCs violates intellectual property rights.
2. Fear of hidden costs when confronted with various “certificate” options rather than the default of “audit” as the obvious choice.



**Figure 3:** Local filmmakers such as John Sham appear as guests in the MOOC.

3. Additional preparation time needed to incorporate material created by other instructors.
4. Expectation of compensation for using MOOC materials in a pre-existing course, since partners may feel obligated to interact with learners not paying tuition at their local institution.
5. Conviction that any expansion or use of online materials provides a rationale to reduce funding for tenure-track positions locally.
6. Impression that online discussion among students and video lectures are not as pedagogically effective as face-to-face interactions.

In fact, some of these misconceptions do contain a kernel of veracity:

1. MOOC creators rather than providers bear the burden of copyright clearance for the materials included even though everything offered on these platforms is ostensibly open access without restriction. In film studies, copyright clearance, intellectual property rights, and fair use are contentious issues faced by educators, filmmakers, and critics on a routine basis. The fair use of clips, frame grabs, publicity materials, and other visual quotations to support teaching and research may be defined differently by publishers, producers, and lawyers involved in higher education. In the case of *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens*, we pay copyright holders for the use of clips, but consider frame grabs and posters covered by fair use for critical commentary and educational purposes. However, each MOOC provider sets its own limits, and, sadly, film studies as a discipline too often suffers.

2. The costs of creating a MOOC and gaining access to established platforms make it difficult for educators at smaller or less well-funded institutions to join in this initiative. Two tiers emerge of provider institutions such as the University of Hong Kong and others who may or may not decide to supplement their teaching with MOOCs produced by others. In this respect, the perceived need to attract “massive” numbers of learners through top university brands limits the ability of MOOCs to aggregate the best research and teaching practices from across a range of institutions geographically. For example, women’s colleges, institutions designed to serve the needs of minorities such as historically African American universities in the United States, and smaller, local institutions with established centers of excellence in specific fields may be unable to contribute to the emerging curricula offered by MOOCs. Chinese-language film scholars tend to work across a wide range of institutions, so their contributions may be limited unless they are able to partner with colleagues at better-funded elite research universities.
3. MOOCs may promise more than they are able to deliver in certain circumstances. Udacity’s highly publicized failure in an experiment with remedial education at San Jose State University in California<sup>6</sup> made many institutions wary of using MOOCs as part of their broader educational mission. In fact, MOOCs serve many functions. They introduce novices to the field, update or expand the knowledge of established teachers and scholars, and give specialists an opportunity to interact with other educators and researchers. Most are not designed to be credit-bearing, stand-alone courses, so they need to be used appropriately as a supplement for the extant curriculum or as a means to sample a discipline without the burden of enrolling in a specific institution and paying tuition fees. MOOCs also open up areas of study not offered at a local college or university so that students can engage in distance learning to augment their campus offerings. In the case of film studies, a teacher in the United States or Europe, for example, could do a virtual exchange with a colleague in China to introduce their students to Chinese-language cinema from a locally informed expert.
4. MOOCs alone cannot replace credit-bearing distance learning or on-campus education. With no admissions system, no recognized credentials, and, usually, only mechanically graded or peer assessments, MOOCs do not provide the same guarantee of mastery that traditional colleges and universities claim. However, they can greatly enhance flipped and blended learning as well as serve as the basis for SPOCs (Small Private Online Course) that can make cross-institutional collaborations easier. Rather than obviate the need for tenure-line

---

<sup>6</sup> For more on the Udacity Project see Rivard (2013).

faculty, these new configurations potentially free up faculty for more fruitful research and teaching by allowing professors with expertise at other institutions to lay the foundation for study or offer specialized material for students.

5. MOOC certificates can be used to show basic mastery of foundational concepts in film studies as part of admissions portfolios, employment applications, and other qualifications for advancing in the field. The completion of a MOOC is not the same as a degree in film studies, but it does indicate more than a passing knowledge of a subject such as Hong Kong cinema. For film teachers at the secondary and tertiary levels, film critics and programmers, filmmakers working in transnational collaborations with Hong Kong, and others involved in global cinema culture, arts, and industry, the *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens* MOOC can augment existing professional knowledge and broaden expertise. MOOCs can also be used in creative ways. For example, *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens* has been used by teachers of English in Hong Kong to expand their students' vocabulary.<sup>7</sup>
6. Limitations on access plague the online dissemination of teaching and research materials. Constraints due to poverty and government regulations can constrict the flow of information on film, in particular, across borders. Access blocked by firewalls and restrictions on the distribution and exhibition of films deemed sensitive hamper efforts to put together online courses as well as joint research projects. In the case of *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens*, the use of YouTube as a platform for lecture videos challenged edX, which provides parallel servers for MOOCs in China, where the YouTube platform is blocked. However, even with these provisions, some learners in mainland China have complained about erratic connections and other technical problems that discouraged them from continuing with the course.

All of these real and imagined challenges to MOOCs can make investment in online education difficult to rationalize. However, given the importance of the motion picture medium as an art, an industry, and a means of disseminating ideas across borders, the need for transnational platforms that allow for learners and researchers to interact on a regular basis is clear. In the case of *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens*, we have been fortunate to secure funding to offer the course through the 2020 calendar year. However, requests to produce a second module in order to provide a full 12 weeks to parallel our on-campus semester offering have been denied.

---

<sup>7</sup> See the newspaper supplement for students: "Movie action in online course," *Sing Tao Education*, February 10, 2017.

The fate of many MOOCs, in fact, seems uncertain. While some MOOCs run continuously without firm start and stop dates, *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens* operates under a different model in which we have distinct student cohorts, start and stop dates for the course, assignment due dates, fresh discussions for each run as well as completely new round up videos for each unit that address specific questions arising from the forum discussion that week. This keeps the MOOC topical, as well, since we are able to incorporate new developments in the field, current issues, and news items germane to the course. Because of the COVID-19 emergency, we kept the course open as learner-paced during part of the spring term in 2020. However, since the course was not designed to accommodate that type of learning, we resumed the instructor-paced mode in the fall term of that year.

When the key instructors are no longer able to make a commitment to the course or funding cuts prevent us from having assistants to handle online discussion and produce weekly round ups, the MOOC will be archived. Although lecture videos and some other materials will continue to be partially available, the beating heart of the MOOC—the active learners and teachers involved in simultaneously engaging with identical material globally—will be lost.

The value of higher education extends beyond knowledge that can be gleaned from watching films and reading scholarship in the field. If educators and their pupils did not believe this, the majority of learners would be autodidacts. Similarly, if the master teacher—acolyte model dominated, individual tutorials would replace the classroom and online tutors would rule. However, extending back in time to the earliest pedagogues and their academies, peer interaction and academic networks produced the greatest educational value. Opening up conversation, debate, and intellectual discourse to cohorts of student who bond transnationally through MOOCs and go on to form professional networks offers enormous potential to diversify film education and bring students closer to an international learning experience without leaving home.

## Taking Online Chinese-Language Film Studies on the Road

In addition to the *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens* MOOC, my website on Hong Kong Women Filmmakers, and my contributions in the online journal *Jump Cut* as a member of its editorial board, I feel that part of my job as a film scholar is to maintain an online social media presence. Although seldom credited as such,

posting on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, as well as contributing to blogs such as *AsiaGlobal Online* have become vital aspects of my work in film studies. Considered “knowledge exchange” at the University of Hong Kong, addressing the public online seems increasingly important as we feel pressure to demonstrate our “impact” beyond the confines of our specific discipline. Film studies, of course, runs the gamut from obscure and highly technical information to commentary on commercial blockbusters and trends in the industry of interest to the lay public. Not all film scholars cover this range, so communicating about the significance of the use of a particular camera lens, for example, by a Hong Kong cinematographer may not be easy. As online communication outside of peer-reviewed journals grows in importance in the discipline, we need to be prepared to justify our teaching and research beyond the classroom and professional academic associations. New online stakeholders emerge through social media groups and Internet discussion platforms, and these netizens represent interests that go beyond the citizens of the states or the countries that support public higher education or the students who pay tuition as well as the donors who finance private institutions.

Global professional contacts become increasingly important to address these emerging needs. In the case of film studies, China’s Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路), for example, may offer an opportunity to do this. Funding for a Belt and Road film MOOC could potentially bring together educators and researchers from mainland China, Hong Kong, and the rest of Asia with Africa and Europe to highlight transnational film connections across East, Central, Southeast, South, and West Asia/the Middle East as well as Africa and Europe. Research on women’s filmmaking, film festivals, transnational co-productions, comparisons of policies, funding, and industries, the dynamics of cultural and aesthetic exchanges, as well as shared histories of collaborations and common themes come immediately to mind as just a few specific areas that could be highlighted in a MOOC devoted to the cinemas of the Silk Road.

As countries such as Trump’s America and post-Brexit United Kingdom put up barriers to the transnational flow of students and scholars, we all become more dependent on online communication to conduct research and reach out to learners hungry to know more about Chinese-language cinema. Actual and potential problems can seem prohibitive; however, it is incumbent upon all of us in the field to make a case for funding and continue to push innovations in teaching and research in order to prevent Chinese-language film studies from being locked in an academic silo only accessible to an elite circle of scholars. Continuing to roam the digital highway seems to be our best bet for the future.

## Postscript

The initial draft of this essay was written before the 2020 COVID-19 crisis put MOOCs and other online learning technologies back at the top of the agenda of global higher education reforms. As digital education expands through MOOCs, online degree programs, and expanded remote learning opportunities, the importance of keeping Chinese-language film studies available as a key part of the expanding digital curriculum remains of vital importance. While courses in Chinese provided by educators in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and elsewhere play an important part in this, courses in other languages, including English, on transnational Chinese cinema maintain a key part of keeping film studies education genuinely global.

**Acknowledgements:** The author's thanks go to the organizers of the *Chinese Cinema and Chinese Film Studies from Global Perspectives* Forum, Institute of Chinese Cinema Studies at the Beijing Film Academy, October 12–13, 2018, for inviting her to Beijing to present this research. The author's appreciation goes to Georgina Challen for helping to prepare this essay for publication.

## References

- Asian Film Archive. 2018. "Terms of Use." Last updated May 23, Also available at <https://www.asianfilmarchive.org/terms-of-use/>.
- CCGL9001 Hong Kong Cinema through A Global Lens. Common Core Course Offered by the University of Hong Kong; Video Podcasts. Uploaded April 2016. Also available at <https://ccgl9001.wordpress.com/>.
- China Underground. n.d. <https://china-underground.com/> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Chinese Film Festival Studies Research Network. n.d. <http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/chinesefilmfeststudies/> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Chinese Movie Database. n.d. <https://www.dianying.com/> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- dGenerate Films. n.d. <https://www.dgeneratefilms.com/> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Grant, C. 2018. "Celebrating Ten Years of FILM STUDIES FOR FREE, with Two New Aretha-On-Film Tributes and Tens of Other Awesome Links!" Film Studies For Free. Also available at <https://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2018/08/celebrating-ten-years-of-film-studies.html>.
- Hong Kong Cinémagic. n.d. <http://www.hkcinemagic.com/en/main.asp> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Hong Kong Movie Database. n.d. <http://www.hkmbd.com/> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Hong Kong Women Filmmakers. 2015. Also available at <https://hkwomenfilmmakers.wordpress.com/>. Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/hkwomenfilmmakers/>.
- Huang, X. 2018. "东方电影/Eastern/Oriental Cinema." Wuhan University MOOC hosted on the iCourse website. First offered in May 2018. Also available at <https://www.icourse163.org/course/WHU-1002711005>.



- Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*. n.d. <https://ejumpcut.org/> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Lee, K. B. 2015. "071. A Revolution on Screen: The Cinema of the People's Republic of China (Part 1)" and "072. A Revolution on Screen: The Cinema of the People's Republic of China (Part 2)." Uploaded June 15, 2015. Vimeo videos, 10:29; 12:16. Also available at <https://vimeo.com/130812698>; <https://vimeo.com/130812753>.
- Liu, J., and W. Lin. n.d. "後現代都會電影:台北/Postmodern Metropolitan Films: Taipei." Fu Jen Catholic University MOOC archived on the Chinese Open Education Consortium website. <https://www.openedu.tw/course.jsp?id=37&lang=en> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Marchetti, G., A. H. J. Magnan-Park, and S. Ford. 2017a. "Enter the Future: Behind the Scenes of a New MOOC." *British Universities Film & Video Council*. March 24, 2017. Also available at <http://bufvc.ac.uk/articles/hong-kong-cinema-mooc>.
- Marchetti, G., A. H. J. Magnan-Park, and S. Ford. 2017b. "Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens." *University of Hong Kong MOOC hosted on the edX website*. First offered in February 2017. Also available at <https://www.edx.org/course/hong-kong-cinema-through-a-global-lens>.
- Marchetti, G., A. H. J. Magnan-Park, and S. Ford. 2018. "MOOCs Turn Local into Global." *AsiaGlobal Online*, January 18, 2018. Also available at <http://www.asiaglobalonline.hku.hk/moocs-turn-local-into-global/>.
- Maslen, G. 2018. "The Unfulfilled Promise of Online Higher Education." *University World News*, July 27, 2018. Also available at <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20180725115215946>.
- Modern Chinese Literature and Culture (MCLC) Resource Center. n.d. Managed by Kirk A. Denton. The Ohio State University. <https://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Movie Action in Online Course." *Sing Tao Education*, February 10, 2017. Also available at [http://stedu.stheadline.com/sec/sec\\_news.php?aid=16794&cat=2&subcat=7](http://stedu.stheadline.com/sec/sec_news.php?aid=16794&cat=2&subcat=7).
- Rivard, R. 2013. "Udacity Project on 'Pause'." *Inside Higher*, July 18, 2013. Also available at <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/07/18/citing-disappointing-student-outcomes-san-jose-state-pauses-work-udacity>.
- Screening the Past*. n.d. <http://www.screeningthepast.com/> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Shen, L. 2014. "中国电影史话/History of Chinese Films." Nanchang University MOOC hosted on the iCourse website. First offered in 2014. Also available at <http://www.icourses.cn/web/sword/portal/videoDetail?courseId=ff8080814963c052014963dff52f0041#/?resId=ff8080814963c052014963e47e250043>.
- Shen, L. 2018. "光影·光阴——早期中国电影漫谈系列/ Light and Shadow, Time and Shadow—Early Chinese Cinema Talk Series." Nanchang University MOOC hosted on the iCourse website. First offered in March 2018. Also available at <https://www.icourse163.org/course/NCU-1002476002>.
- Taiwan Film Database. n.d. <http://search.ctfa.org.tw/TFDBSearch/index.php> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- The Best Online Bachelor's In Film Programs. n.d. BestColleges Website. <https://www.bestcolleges.com/features/top-online-film-programs/> (accessed November 25, 2020).
- Zhang, A. n.d. "中国西部电影精品读解/ Introduction to Western Chinese Films." Northwest University MOOC hosted on the iCourse website. <http://www.icourses.cn/web/sword/portal/videoDetail?courseId=ff8080814d755151014d8f1977350af1#/?resId=ff8080814d755151014d8f1acd640af5> (accessed November 25, 2020).

Zhou, X. n.d. “中国电影艺术史 (包括内地, 香港和台湾)/History of Chinese Film Art.” Beijing Normal University MOOC hosted on the iCourse website. [http://www.icourses.cn/sCourse/course\\_3826.html](http://www.icourses.cn/sCourse/course_3826.html) (accessed November 25, 2020).

## Bionote

**Gina Marchetti**

University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

[marchett@hku.hk](mailto:marchett@hku.hk)

Gina Marchetti teaches courses in film, gender, and sexuality, critical theory and cultural studies at the University of Hong Kong. She is the author of *Romance and the ‘Yellow Peril’: Race, Sex and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (University of California, 1993), *From Tian’anmen to Times Square: Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), *The Chinese Diaspora on American Screens: Race, Sex, and Cinema* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), *Andrew Lau and Alan Mak’s INFERNAL AFFAIRS—The Trilogy* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), and *Citing China: Politics, Postmodernism, and World Cinema* (Hawaii, 2018). Visit the website <https://hkwomenfilmmakers.wordpress.com/> for more information about her work on Hong Kong women filmmakers since 1997.