

# Chapter 4

## Using Films to Teach Culture in a Flipped Classroom

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter discussed incorporating the wedding scenes in Yi-Mou Zhang's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) and Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) into a flipped classroom in higher education to teach students traditional Chinese wedding and marriage. The chapter adopted a multimodal perspective, relying on the visual and aural modes to exhibit the traditional Chinese marriage concepts, wedding procedures, activities, participants, decorations, music, colours, and the newlyweds' wedding dresses (attires, makeup, hairstyles) to students. The study demonstrated that films helped the instructor illustrate cultural theories and concepts and promoted students' cultural learning. Students' performance revealed that the flipped model enhances preparatory work and active learning, and embedding films into teaching has benefits and drawbacks.*

### INTRODUCTION

The selected cultural subject is developed for native English speakers. The subject focuses on teaching major Chinese festivals and ceremonies. It aims to help students understand the ideas, values, and beliefs embedded in the practices of festivals and ceremonies. The subject is divided into 12 weeks, covering a new topic each week. The subject consists of a 1.5 hours lecture and a 1.5 hours tutorial each week. While lectures are prepared to teach relevant theories, tutorials are used to expand discussions and help students practice what they have learned in lectures and pre-class exercises. This chapter selected the flipped tutorial of week 2, which discussed traditional Chinese wedding and marriage, as the research focus. The selected tutorial has 12 native English speakers and was conducted in an interactive classroom.

This chapter paid particular attention to how Yi-Mou Zhang's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) and Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) taught students about traditional Chinese wedding and marriage in the tutorial of week 2. Traditional Chinese wedding and marriage have evolved over the course of history. In this chapter, they refer to the general characteristics of wedding customs and marriage

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concepts of different dynasties and ethnic groups. These two films were chosen as teaching materials for the flipped tutorial for three main reasons. First, it is not easy to find films that are made specifically to teach traditional Chinese wedding and marriage in the literature. The selected films are one of the few that relatively realistically and comprehensively portray traditional Chinese wedding customs and marriage concepts, although they are not produced for educational purposes. In other words, the selected films have teachable moments that can be embedded in teaching to achieve tutorial objectives. Second, the selected films are more approachable than other strictly copyrighted or unsubtitled films. They are free for people to watch on YouTube and have English subtitles to assist English speakers in better understanding the film content. Third, the two selected films are set in different social and historical contexts, providing students with more opportunities to compare and reflect on wedding customs and marriage concepts (e.g., compare how people practice traditions in different social contexts, reflect on the status of women in marriage in different eras), thereby deepening their understanding of learned cultural knowledge.

More precisely, adopting a multimodal approach, this study used teachable wedding scenes from the two films to teach English speakers about traditional Chinese wedding customs and marriage concepts through activities such as discussion, reading, and writing. This study also showed how the flipped pedagogy, related films, and cultural theories were integrated into the pre-tutorial, tutorial, and post-tutorial phases. The multimodal approach is ‘an inter-disciplinary approach that understands communication and representation to be more than about language’ (Mode, 2012). The multimodal perspective is chosen because it allows students to understand how traditional Chinese wedding customs and marriage concepts are manifested through wedding procedures, activities, participants, decoration, music, colours, and dresses (attires, makeup, hairstyle).

## **BACKGROUND**

Culture is defined as ‘a complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviours, practices, rituals, and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institution they create’ (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino, & Kohler, 2003, p. 45). Students can gain cultural experience by immersing themselves in a target culture. Yet, not all of them have the opportunity to live in or travel to a foreign culture. In this sense, integrating films into the teaching and learning activities is necessary as ‘film is uniquely equipped to record and reveal physical reality’ (Kracauer, 1997, p. 28). Films tell stories about people, demonstrate socially acceptable behaviours, and show changes and developments in cultural conventions. They are an effective platform for teaching and learning culture (Champoux, 1999; Mallinger & Rossy, 2003, p. 608). Robert Watson points out that

*[T]he culture provided by all the mass media, but particularly by film and television, represents the most significant environmental factor that teachers have to take into account.*

*(Watson cited in Istanto, 2009, p. 280)*

The use of films as a pedagogical tool began in the 1970s (Champoux, 1999, p. 206). Hart Wegner (1977) is a pioneer who integrated films into the classroom. In *Teaching with Film* (1977), he discusses how various film types, including narrative feature films, animated films, documentaries, and experi-

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