

## Asian 204, Summer 2010 Questions 07

### Discussion Questions for *Not One Less*

1. A narrative—an account of a series of events—is often built around one or more conflicts or problems that need to be resolved. Think about the story of the first half of the movie in terms of a series of problems. How does each conflict or problem lead to the next?

*Example: The first problem in the film is that the village needs to find a substitute teacher. The next is...*

2. What are the protagonist's (Wei Minzhi, "Teacher Wei") goals at the opening of the story? What are they at the halfway point? Has she grown as a person in the interval? Has your perception of her and her situation changed?
3. *The White-Haired Girl* is perhaps the most "stylized" or "formalistic" of the works we have looked at in class—the one in which the artistic conventions are most obviously removed from "real life." *Not One Less* may be the most "naturalistic"—the one that tries hardest to make art look like life. In what ways does it do so? What are the limits of its "realism" or "naturalism"? What are the effects of this naturalistic approach?

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4. Briefly sum up the second half of the film in terms of the successive conflicts/problems that drive the plot.
5. How does Wei Minzhi compare with the female protagonists of other works we have studied? Consider her social background; her personality; the challenges she faces; her role in the story-line as a whole; her relationships with other characters; the techniques by which she is represented to the audience.

6. What other works we have studied portray the experiences of country folk in the city? How does this film's portrayal of the urban environment, and of rural characters' experiences in the city, compare with that of other works?
7. Does the film identify causes of the problems it portrays? To what extent, and in what ways, does it portray characters in the story as either "heroes" or "villains"?

**Discussion Questions for Sheldon Lu, "Chinese Film Culture..."**

1. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a "topic" as "the subject of a discourse, argument, or literary composition; a matter treated in speech or writing." It defines "thesis" as "a proposition laid down or stated, esp. as a theme to be discussed and proved, or to be maintained against attack; a statement, assertion, tenet." What is the topic of this article? Does it have a thesis; if so, what is it?
2. In the opening of the article, Lu introduces three strands of 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese culture: "elite culture," "popular culture," and "official ideology." What, according to Lu, is their relationship at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
3. In what sense can *Not One Less* be understood as a "national allegory," and who understands it in this way?
4. According to Lu, what stage does *Not One Less* mark in Zhang Yimou's career? How is this stage representative of broader trends in mainland Chinese film?