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Cultural Fluidity in Global Literary Pedagogy: Teaching *Hamlet* in China with *The Banquet*

During the 2008 spring semester, I taught a research writing course for the joint venture between the New York Institute of Technology and the Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications. I relished the global opportunity to engage students who were just as curious about me as an American professor as I was about them as Chinese students.

However, there seemed to be a dam separating the Eastern and Western waters. I tried to connect with these students, but they grasped very few of my cultural references and humorous asides. Moreover, they were struggling with the Western literary texts that dominated the syllabus. I needed to find a way to connect, to open the dam's floodgates gradually, and to facilitate greater cultural fluidity.

I watched Chinese films to see if I could relate through their popular culture. I bought several DVDs in downtown Nanjing and began my viewing with *The Banquet* (2006), simply because I recognized the actress Zhang Ziyi from *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), a popular hit in America. About ten minutes into the film I realized I was watching a Chinese reinterpretation of *Hamlet*. Perfect! I just so happened to be teaching *Hamlet* that semester, and I was struggling with how to make this Shakespeare play relevant to the Chinese students. I shifted my pedagogy and had the students engage comparative analysis of Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990) and Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*.

In this presentation, I will outline the activity I developed, discussing the strategies I used to reshape the classroom into a dynamic interpretive community. In particular, I will share our experiences discovering how universal human themes take on culturally specific expressions and how examining these unique expressions enables us to understand more fully our complex global society.