Every year, China's filmmakers complete more than 500 feature films, and every year, the vast number aren't theatrically released in the United States. The ones that are tend to be action films, like *Hero* from 2004 or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* from 2000. That means gems like *Getting Home*, by "Sixth Generation" Chinese director Zhang Yang, are frequently overlooked by mainstream American audiences. What a shame.

A sensitive comedy about a poor construction worker who tries to carry his deceased colleague across country for proper burial, *Getting Home* is one of the best films I've seen from China in the past 10 years. The *Global Film Initiative*, which is based in San Francisco, featured *Getting Home* in its 2009 traveling film series called "Global Lens." And the film is screening this Saturday at Chinatown's *Great Star Theater* as part of a new Global Film Initiative series called "Arthouse Revival." The series supports the revival of independent arthouse cinema around the United States (the Great Star reopened in 2010 after 12 years of being shuttered), and the series' emphasis on Chinese-language films is ideal given China's outsized role in world affairs and the need to see the country in a way that complements the harder edges we get from political and economic news.

On economic and military matters, America is obsessed with China. According to Gallup's most recent World Affairs poll, Americans consider China the U.S.'s second-greatest "enemy," below Iran and ahead of North Korea. On matters of art, America is also becoming transfixed by China. U.S. sales of fine arts from China are at record levels, and there is more interest than ever in Chinese cinema, even if it's cinema that skews toward knife-throwing and acrobatic karate-kicking. In many ways we've come full-circle from the 1960s, when action films from Hong Kong found a theatrical home in the United States, including the Great Star Theater, which is located on Jackson Street. Today's generation of Chinese films -- including *Beijing Flickers*, a Zhang Yang drama about young educated workers who are marginalized, which is screening this Friday at the Great Star -- have social issues at their core. As funny as it is, *Getting Home* gets into themes of poverty and social hierarchies in China, too.
"Behind the Politik and rhetoric of China, there's an evolving social consciousness that's being exported via independent film, in a way not really seen since the Hong Kong cinema of the '60s," Santhosh Daniel, the Global Film Initiative's Director of Programs, tells me. "It makes sense," he adds, "why we'd show at the Great Star."

The Center for Asian American Media, which puts on the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival, is co-sponsoring the series on Friday and Saturday. Besides *Beijing Flickers* and *Getting Home*, the "Arthouse Revival" series features *The Cremator*, about an undertaker who arranges marriages for dead men and women; and *Stolen Life*, about a young woman who wrestles between life with a new lover and a potential life in college. In *Getting Home*, the Chinese comic actor Zhao Benshan plays a middle-aged man (also named Zhao) who puts his dead friend on his back for the long walk/ride/hitchhike from their southern Chinese city to the rural mountains. Along the way, Zhao's bus is robbed by bandits (who retreat after Zhao explains that he's escorting a dead man); he pretends to grieve at a stranger's apparent funeral just to get the accompanying dinner; and he falls in love with a quasi-homeless woman who, like him, tries to sell her blood for money. The vistas of countryside, mountains and tributaries are a spectacular backdrop to the goings-on. Funny, poetic, and thought-provoking without being demagogic (or sophomoric), *Getting Home* was inspired by a news account of a poor man who attempted a similar trek with a dead friend. Zhang Yang met that poor man in real life, traveling across country to hear his story firsthand.

*Getting Home* reminds me of the Iranian film *Taste of Cherry*, Abbas Kiarostami's masterpiece about a man who drives around Tehran looking for someone to oversee his own burial. In the right cinematic hands, the topic of death can jump-start a story that makes the audience feel more alive than ever.

For the Global Film Initiative's "Arthouse Revival" series, *Beijing Flickers* screens 7:30pm on Friday, Nov. 30, 2012 at the Great Star Theater in San Francisco, with a 6pm reception at the Chinese Culture
Center of San Francisco. On Saturday, Dec. 1, *Getting Home* screens at 2pm, followed by *Stolen Life* at 5pm and *The Cremator* at 8pm. For tickets and more information, visit caamedia.org. Friday's event requires online registration TODAY, Tuesday, Nov. 27, at tinyurl.com/cddJs2m.

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