**Movie title, director's name, year of production, length (minutes)**

**Full Circle** ***Feiyue laoren yuan*** **飛越老人遠 Zhang Yang** 2012 (101 minutes)

* **Introduction (director; general interest (incl. to Medical and Health Humanities)**

The Chinese title (translated as **“Flying over the Hospice**”) pays obvious tribute to Milos Forman’s “**One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**”, but instead of following the dark theme of Forman's classic, Zhang has managed to produce a bittersweet family drama. This is a movie that could be easily renamed “No home for old men”. It is both a comedy-drama and a road movie that sees old people as actively seeking to escape from the place and the role that society has imposed on them and draws our attention to the condition of old people and the progressive undermining of traditional family values in contemporary China. The message is about people's ability to realise their dreams at any age, and to prove, as one character says, that there comes a time in parents' lives when they have to think of themselves for once, after a lifetime of self-sacrifice for their children.

**Synopsis/plot**

The Guanshan Nursing Home in northern China is full of sad stories. All the elderly residents either have no living relations or have been abandoned by their children for various reasons. Some are weak and senile, simply waiting to die, but others are finding interesting things to do in old age. Despite the fact that all the residents receive adequate care, none of them see the nursing home as their real home and none are able to leave. Old Ge (Xu Huanshan), a retired bus driver, is forced to leave his home when his second wife dies and must squeeze into a room at the nursing home his old friend Zhou. Old Zhou (Wu Tianming) would like to be reunited with his daughter, with whom he lost contact many years ago. The only information he has is that she has moved to Japan, so he plans to appear on Japanese television hoping that she will see him. He recruits some of his fellow residents in the home to perform a comic sketch and enter ‘Super Skit’, a Japanese TV talent competition. During rehearsals, two of the group are slightly injured, and the head nurse forbids them to take part in the competition unless all their families agree. However, their families unanimously refuse their consent, prompting the elderly performers to escape from the home, and make a cross-country trek in an ancient bus rescued from the scrapyard to participate in the local round of the competition being held in Tianjin.

**Cinematography and the Medical Humanities themes**

In the latter part of the movie, Zhang Yang gives us a visually powerful demonstration of the subjective interplay between natural phenomena and man’s inner feelings in the aesthetic and philosophical construction of a work of art. The depiction of nature as a beautiful open space contrasts with the somewhat claustrophobic enclosed spaces of the traditional old courtyard house in which the old people are housed. A herd of wild horses galloping across the steppe seems to re-energise the old people in the bus; sunrise over the Yellow Sea is juxtaposed with the end of life. All these aspects contribute to the display of a Chinese aesthetic conception that resonates with the abstractions and ambiguities of classical Chinese painting and, at the same time, conveys a highly political sense of the alienation of contemporary urban man and his need to liberate himself by reconnecting with nature.

**The Director**

From the first, Zhang Yang has been a pioneer in addressing painful national themes indirectly and in a manner acceptable to the widest possible Chinese audience and to the censors. Every one of the films he has shot in recent years has been a variation on the family-separation trope that constitutes a recurring strand throughout Chinese-language melodrama (known as *lunli qinqing pian*, or "ethical family-affection films"), a framework that often conceives of the family home as a battleground between tradition and modernity.

**The Cast**

The cast consists of some of the best-known figures of Chinese movie history, renowned and honored old actors mostly in their seventies and over. Old Zhou is played by the 72-year-old [Wu Tianming,](http://www.filmbiz.asia/people/cfc756df6037459ebc9c9bde8ce50623) a key director/producer of the 1980s, a former head of the Xi’an Film Studio, who directed many famous films such as [***Life*** (*Rensheng*, 1984)](http://www.filmbiz.asia/films/e1fbf2f9012e4b9d9f737194fbbd7135), [***Old Well*** (*Laojing*, 1987)](http://www.filmbiz.asia/films/68958934a3ef4af58b8cb5e9a898d7d0) and [***The King of Masks*** (*Bianlian*, 1995)](http://www.filmbiz.asia/films/e8708e45174d406589056deb8460c816). Veteran actor and director Xu Huanshan (***White Deer Plain, The Founding of a Republic, Confucius***); Jiang Hualing (1936-2012) in his last performance and Tian Hua (***The White Haired Girl***), plus a cameo from renowned actress Siqin Gaowa as an old Mongolian nomad, all deliver impressive perfomances in a delightful trip down memory lane for Chinese audiences. They all help to make this movie very charming and a most welcome change from the *shuaige meinü* (handsome boy and beautiful girl) formula of so many commercial Chinese movies of recent years.

**Points for Discussion**

* What are the challenges facing care of the elderly and dying?
* What are the specific challenges facing China?
* How does this film represent them?
* Are the elderly better supported within the community or in specialized communities?
* How does the breakdown o f the traditional Chinese family impact on the elderly?
* What are the opportunities for empowering the elderly?
* How can the elderly be mobilized to support younger generations?