

Daniel J. Choi
Chinese Literature 130
TF: Brian Skerratt
Final Project: Artist's Statement

Perspectives of Ruan Lingyu
<http://djchoi.com/ruan/>

MOTIVATION:

Watching *New Women* in class and learning about Ruan Lingyu's life, I became really interested in her life and what she might tell us today about the trials and tribulations she faced. Though her facial expressions conveyed meanings far too great for words to describe, we do not have any records or notes (save her suicide note) from her in her own words. We only have her movies. I was most interested in how she might feel about the circumstances surrounding her death and how she might react to the progress that has been made over the last century, and finally, what she thought about the work that she did.

Given that we are currently in the Information Age of the internet, I felt that there was no more appropriate way for Ruan Lingyu to publish her thoughts to the world than by making a website in which she could address all of her fans. The framing of this discourse within a modern context raises a couple interesting points. First of all, the concept of celebrity has changed. Though Ruan faced numerous inquiries into her personal life by the press, her experience pales in comparison to that of modern day celebrities who are constantly hounded by the paparazzi and defamed by the tabloids. Particularly of interest is how she might navigate the social landscape of the Internet, where one can find both truth and lies in juxtaposition and without labels denoting each as such.

I felt that this project effectively incorporated some of the major themes from the course in that it discusses the role that Ruan Lingyu's silent Chinese films played in her life and in the general struggle against society by women seeking personal and financial independence.

MESSAGE:

As a woman who committed suicide because of the gossip she faced, I imagined that her website would be all about “setting the record straight.” The fact that the Internet enables her to publish her thoughts on a wide scale, and furthermore to have complete control over what content makes it “to press” would likely be a very exciting prospect for her. The front page of her website reads, “It is so important to me that this website exists as a conduit through which my fans can learn my story - straight from the source. Unlike ‘information’ from the tabloids and the press, I have complete control over what you see here, and contained in this website are no rumors, only facts - no gossip, only the truth.” At the same time, she would no doubt like to pander to her fans a little bit, and so I envisioned a Facebook page that would allow her to network with some of them, along with various pieces of memorabilia in commemoration of her film career.

WEBSITE DESIGN:

This section will be divided by the various aspects of the website design:

The Desk

The entire background is supposed to be comprised of various pictures and papers and stains scattered about on a desk. I chose to use a desk because desks are very personal spaces – one has complete control over what they choose to put on their desks, and they are often located in private rooms like a bedroom. A visitor to the website can learn about Ruan in much the same way that one could learn a lot about a person by what they choose to place upon their desk.

The Pictures/Film Reels

The pictures on the desk were culled from the Internet in an attempt to showcase the myriad roles that Ruan took during her short acting career. The largest photo – the one in the top right that stands alone – was chosen and edited specifically because of Ruan’s expression. As she does in many of her films, she is looking away from the camera with an incredibly subtle expression of longing, her eyebrows arched ever so slightly give her a look of sadness and helplessness, while the stoic manner in which she

holds her lips speak to her poise and strength. I felt that the feelings emoted through this picture accurately represented those that she must have felt in her own life.

The Color Scheme

I wanted to give the website a grittier feel because Ruan Lingyu's movies – particularly *The Goddess* – also have a gritty feel to them (and it's not just about the quality of the film). The splash of red not only provides a good background for the website navigation, but it also symbolizes passion and intensity, two characteristics that Ruan brought to every one of her roles.

The Nametag (and Chinese name)

The yellow nametag was created somewhat out of necessity. I needed to provide a title to the page and to grab the visitor's attention. The lipstick mark on the nametag symbolizes femininity while the choice to kiss the note speaks to the choice of a strong woman. As women forced into marriages or prostitution, the many characters that Ruan played often were refused choices that they should have had the right to make.

Additionally, though it is primarily aesthetic in value, I placed the Chinese character form of Ruan Lingyu's name in the top left corner. Given that she changed her name from Ruan Fenggeng, I imagined her taking a liking to the sound of Ruan Lingyu and perhaps scratching that name into her desk, as a declaration of the woman she chose to become.

CONTENT:

As I wanted the website to mirror many of the other fan pages and celebrity pages on the Internet today, the content itself is somewhat standard. I wrote Ruan a short biography and I included selected works from her filmography. Regarding her filmography, I went a little further in depth, posting brief descriptions and selected scenes from some of the films. I selected each of the scenes after watching some of the films and wrote short reactions that Ruan Lingyu might have to them. The tone of her comments is similar to that which one might find in a DVD commentary track today. I also wrote a short reaction to *Center Stage* from Ruan's point of view. I felt that since

the website's theme is Ruan speaking from beyond the grave, it would be very interesting to include her reaction to the biopic created about her life 60 years later and the perspective that it gives the viewer. I also included various pieces of memorabilia that I found interesting as I scoured the net for information on Ruan. Finally, there is the facebook page.

FACEBOOK PAGE:

One of the most interesting features of the Internet is the ability to social network through various websites like Facebook and Twitter. I thought that this would be a very interesting outlet for Ruan to use, especially because of her concerns about her privacy (Facebook in particular has come under a great deal of criticism lately for its recent updates that threaten the privacy of its users). Ruan's profile on Facebook would certainly be set to private so that only her friends could access it, but I also imagined that she would have a lot of friends 1) because of her huge fan base and 2) because she would want to be the source from which her fans get their information (rather than the press). This page simulates what a friend of Ruan's might see upon visiting her profile.

There are so many subtle aspects to this page that I think it would be more interesting for the viewer to simply look at the page and try to find them, rather than enumerate them myself. To explain the extent to which this page is personalized for Ruan Lingyu, though, I will just say that the only part left untouched is the links at the very bottom of the page. Please enjoy!

OTHER THINGS I WISH I HAD TIME TO DO:

Designing and coding websites takes a long time – and I was fairly nitpicky about the very little details. For example, I went through 3 different complete designs before settling on the current one, and the current website background involved over 15 layers of originally created content and close to 8 hours of work to get just right. Additionally, the facebook page alone took around 10 hours to complete – I took a real facebook page and matched the content to the pixel. The whole project took 18 HTML and CSS files, around 100 photoshop files, and a little over 40 hours from conception to completion, though I realize that it may seem less involved than some clips that would take this long

to produce. In my defense, I would like to merely point out that every single detail of this website needed to be planned and created, while cameras can capture beautiful and subtle things that already exist in the world.

If I had more time, I would have liked to write a couple reviews on Ruan's movies from another point of view along with her reactions and responses to those reviews. I think it would add a new dimension to the website to have somewhat of a dialogue going on between Ruan and her fans/critics.

Another project would be to actually get a hold of all her movies that still exist and select more scenes from each for quick analyses. I was only able to obtain The Goddess and New Women, so I was fairly limited in my options. Given more time, I would have liked to dig up some of the lesser-known films.

IN CONCLUSION:

The process of creating this final project has been incredibly educational and rewarding. I enjoy doing web design in my free time, and so this gave me a chance to both polish my design skills and learn more about this fascinating actress. Watching her perform, especially in The Goddess, evoked in me such strong emotions that I was left at the brink of tears near the end of the film. Her facial expressions and movements tell stories that can hardly be captured even by modern day cameras. Throughout the design and creation process, I constantly found myself wanting to actually talk with her about her work, and I imagine that many others feel the same way, which is why I think this website presents such a cool perspective on her life.

I hope you have as much fun looking through the pages as I did making them. There are many other things hidden within the pages that I did not mention, and I encourage you to look closely to find them.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Choi', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Daniel J. Choi