

Project Proposal for 归舟 Gui Zhou (The Return)

Background and Question(s)

I often try to imagine my mother's move to America in 1994. Even though I was born in the US and have stayed here for most of my life, I still learn to mirror my mother, saying “go back” when referring to traveling across the Pacific. My mother’s motherland is a recurring character in my prose and poetry. Taiwan’s humidity, its gushing fruits, afternoon thunderstorms, that familiar alleyway behind my grandfather’s house and the dog that resided in it – these things have a grip on my mind when it comes to my origins. And yet, there is a generational gap that has compounded. In this gap I find a depth in myself that I peer into again and again.

A few years ago I began learning more about my mother’s own journey, and she told me that she had written a feature length script in 1996 after starting film school at Ohio University on scholarship, in both Chinese and English. We read it together again in the lull of the pandemic. The screenplay was titled 归舟, directly translating to “A Ship Returns,” but translated to “The Return” in English.

The Return is a pseudo-documentary about family estrangement after the main character, Li Shan, returns from seven years of being abroad and is both nervous and thrilled by the material development of her maternal land. As a filmmaker herself, she uses her fresh eyes to look for inspiration. Li Shan reconnects with her childhood friend Shu Mei and together they chase down the elusive character Zhi Yuan, Shu Mei’s older brother and someone both her and Li Shan idolized as children. On a path of discovery and disillusionment, they follow the path of Zhi Yuan through the countryside using the clues left in a series of romantic and adventurous letters he had sent home through the years. The story ends with the two women trading places, with Li Shan staying in Taipei to continue filmmaking and Shu Mei traveling abroad.

After just two years of her arrival in the US, my mother had begun thinking about the way time works when people emigrate, how worlds are lost and built. It was relevant to her then, but I realized it is relevant to me now, especially upon my return to Taiwan. At the core of Gui Zhou is the unreachable character Zhi Yuan and reading this I found it to be parallel to my own search for identity, belonging, and lost time with my family. I want to adapt and realize this script as a 20 minute narrative film with documentary and experimental elements, casting myself as the main character in the story contemplating cultural and generational gaps.

For inspiration, I will be looking to New Taiwanese Cinema, masterpieces like *Yi Yi* directed by Edward Yang, along with recent Asian American works like *Past Lives* directed by Celine Song, both of which use dramatic camera movement to reveal truths about space and time. I will also

be conducting research in the personal essay and documentary genres in order to gain a better understanding of how similar works explore identity and generational history.

Methods

1. Revisiting my mother's old script, revising it and adapting it to a documentary format. This will mean working closely with her and reading both Chinese and English versions. The process of script writing is more comparable to crafting an invitation rather than a finished or "perfect" product. I anticipate the script to go through multiple drafts before the start of filming in order to adapt to my actual experience of returning to Taiwan and the conversations I will have there. That being said, I do want to have a completed draft of the script before I travel there in order to have an opportunity to meditate on the meaning and goals of the trip and review my mother's old script once more.
2. Consulting my faculty advisor Anna Hogg on my rough draft (~20 pages) and conducting table reads with my peers.
3. Traveling to Taiwan, reconnecting with family members, conducting interviews and researching my familial history. Documenting parts of this process.
4. Revising the script again with new knowledge the first two weeks in Taiwan, casting my family and the people I meet there as both actors and non actors in the film.
5. Shooting the film over the course of the next four weeks. Since the film centers around a filmmaker, I anticipate a more deconstructed approach, allowing moments of reality to bleed into a constructed narrative. This means I will be using a variety of mediums, HD footage, camcorder video, and analog film.
6. Conduct post-production (editing, sound design, special effects, color correction) in the preceding four weeks after filming, acquiring pick-up shots deemed necessary during the editing process. The goal is to have a final cut by the end of the four weeks.

Project Timeline

<i>Time</i>	<i>Objectives</i>
April - May 21	Pre-Production (US) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reading and revising script
May 24 - June 1 (7 days)	Pre-Production (Taipei) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Traveling to Taipei on 22nd of May- Interviewing, conducting research- Revising script- Casting and location scouting
June 2024	Production <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Filming and traveling
July 2024	Post Production

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assembly, Sound Design, Color Correction - Multiple drafts and critiques - Pick up shots
August 2024	<p>Project Release</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outcome Report - Submission to film festivals - Screening in Taipei and Charlottesville

Anticipated Outcomes

At the end of this project, I will have created a twenty minute narrative film with documentary elements, using the loose structure of the original script’s narrative while having my own journey in Taiwan interspersed between. I am committed to revising it multiple times – having numerous table reads and critiques before the school year ends so that the summer can be spent on adapting the already condensed script to the people I connect and reconnect with in Taiwan, along with shooting the film itself and the editing process. I am very fortunate to have Professor Anna Hogg guide me in the writing and editing process, in addition to acquiring part of the filming and recording equipment I will need to take overseas.

The research and pre-production for this project will be carried out in my advanced cinematography class. As a rising fourth year applying to the Distinguished Majors Program in the studio art department, the work I do on this project will also be leading to my senior art show. This trip will also serve as fodder for my fourth year thesis in the Applied Program in Literary prose, a manuscript of fiction and nonfiction.

Significance of the Work

I believe I should be awarded the Rising 4th Year Grant because works that delve into intimate and personal issues are paradoxically also the works that can connect people the most. Almost everyone feels cultural, generational, or political disconnect in their own families. I hope this film will bring comfort to those who see it and encourage people to reach back and revisit their own origins on philosophical and emotional levels. If I am able to have the opportunity to complete this project, I would share it with my wide-spanning family and found family in both Taiwan and Charlottesville, daring to bridge a gap that has been a part of me for as long as I can remember.

Furthermore, Gui Zhou will explore diaspora on three levels. Through its direct narrative of Li Shan returning to Taiwan, the film will first untangle her culture shock of the urban and industrial development in her homeland, her desire to fill the years she’s missed from being abroad. Secondly, the film will explore the experience of immigrant estrangement of the original script writer, my mother. It will soon be the thirty year anniversary of her leaving her homeland, and working with her and featuring her in the film will give a sense of elapsed time, allowing the story to also contemplate on one of its author’s longing to return and her imagination of the

homeward journey. Lastly, my own alienation from my mother’s motherland as a second-generation Asian American will be investigated. Through the first two levels I have mentioned, I hope to obliquely reach an understanding of my own phantasmic connection I have with Taipei and Taiwan in the organic discoveries I will make upon my return.

Currently, part of this project is funded by the Undergraduate Art Awards for Arts Projects for \$5000. This grant provides a summertime stipend to cover living expenses (rent, utilities, food, etc.) but does not include expenses for travel or equipment. Being able to cover travel expenses and filmmaking supplies to bring abroad would be instrumental to overcoming the economic barriers and realizing my project.

Budget

Item	Cost
Color Film (4 rolls)	\$259.80
Processing (4 rolls)	\$160.00
Sony - HDRCX405 HD Video Recording Handycam Camcorder (black)	\$228.00
Gimbal (DJI RS 3 Pro Combo)	\$1048.99
Adobe Suite subscription (1 year subscription, student discount)	\$239.88
CFast Card Extreme Pro (512 GB)	\$359.99
Travel Cost in Taiwan (taxi, subway pass, train tickets)	\$500.00
Promotions, Festival Submissions	\$500.00
Totals	\$3256.66 Out of pocket expenses: \$256.66 Requesting: \$3000.00

Justification for Funding

Gui Zhou is going to be a film that teeters between the past and present. Thus, I want the medium to reflect its exploration of time passed from one generation to the next, requiring the use of different video styles. That is why I am requesting funding for my multiple “b-cams”: **Color Film**, **Film Processing** fees, along with a **Camcorder**. Footages shot in these more analog modes will be interspersed between the austere cinematography shot with a blackmagic pocket

camera, which I will be borrowing from the Studio Art department. The blackmagic pocket camera is a very heavy device. And because I want to achieve a lot of moving and handheld shots, I am also requesting funds for a **Gimbal**. In order to maximize the contrast between the analog footage and the blackmagic footage, I need to purchase a Cfast card that can process and store up to 4k video. For the editing process, I will need an **Adobe Suite subscription** to edit video (Premiere Pro), sound (Audition), and create graphic designs (Photoshop & Illustrator) for promotional content.

The shooting of Gui Zhou will mostly take place in Taipei, but I will have to travel for some parts of the film's narrative. If I were to receive the rising 4th year award, I would want to allocate a portion of the grant funds for **subway passes, taxi fees to and from airports/remote locations, as well as train tickets** to visit the middle and southern parts of Taiwan.

No matter how formally strong or narratively moving a film is, its visibility and promotion can be just as important in order to catch people's attention. I hope to submit the finished product of Gui Zhou to the festival circuit. In order to do so, I am in need of funds for **submission fees**. Submissions range from 30-70 dollars and I plan to submit to at least 10 film festivals. As a student entering their fourth year who is considering applying to graduate programs specializing in writing and directing films, it would be invaluable for me to have the accolades to back up my work and help me stand out in the sea of applicants.

Participation in the Arts

During my time at UVA, I have represented the studio art department in the Adrenaline Film Competition at Lighthouse Studio along with other studio art students, where my team was awarded the Mentor's Award and a cash prize. During the summer of 2023 I was selected to go to the Mountain Lake Biological Station Student Art Residency where I made an experimental documentary that was later installed in Ruffin for the month of November. Last summer I worked at the Fralin museum as an intern, researching artworks for their Writer's Eye Program and putting together documents for docents. In the 2023-2024 academic year, I joined the V-mag creative writing editing team, was accepted into the Fralin Student Docent Program,, and am now a part of the recently reinstated Art Student Society.

As for involvement in the MAS community, I have taken the CASS 1010 Seminar where I was able to meet and connect with other highly motivated students pursuing degrees in studio art, music, and creative writing. To complete my service for the scholar community, I will be taking the CASS Discussion course next spring. I will also be running for Studio Art Chair in the Miller Arts Scholar Student Executive Committee this semester.