

CET Syllabus of Record

Program: Chinese Studies and Internship in Beijing

Course Title: Discovering China Through Film

Course Code: CS285

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Suggested Cross Listings: Chinese Studies, Media Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description

This course provides an overview of some of the most important and influential films produced in mainland China since 1949. Films from various significant genres of contemporary Chinese film are viewed and analyzed as reflecting, and often critiquing, contemporary Chinese society, politics and culture. The main focus is on the Fifth-Generation mainland directors, as well as notable “revolutionary cinema” works from the 1950s and 1970s. In addition, film showings also include some groundbreaking new works by the new generation of filmmakers in the 1990s, the so-called “Sixth-Generation” directors, as well as a new breed of independent documentary filmmakers. All films featured in the course are chosen to inform our understanding of modern China in terms of its material culture and ideology. Readings for the course focus on such issues as politics, gender, art, war and peace, family, migrancy, and urban demolition and relocation. Field trips to the film studios and meetings with the directors will supplement the class screenings and readings.

Objectives

Through the lens of Chinese cinema, students gain a familiarity with aspects of China such as: (1) the hierarchical structure and decision-making process of the PRC government, (2) the distinctive dynamic of politics, economy and legal system in the PRC, and how it differs from other models, (3) the social realities of human rights, economic inequality and ethnic minorities in China and how they impinge on political governance, and (4) how the PRC is taking its place on the world stage as an economic and military power, as well as how this effects domestic politics in the country.

Course Requirements

Student participation, including active contributions to class discussion, is an important part of the grade. Students should complete all reading assignments before coming to class. About 50 pages of reading are assigned for each class meeting. Students must attend all classes and screenings and read all the mandatory reading material. The midterm exam is based on this material. After each film screening, the student must write a one-page response paper providing overall impressions of the film and issues to be discussed in class. A final term paper is required (10 pages in length, on topics to be announced), which should be well-written, well-researched and should make use of the supplementary reading material.

Methods of Evaluation

The final grade shall be determined as follows:

Participation 10%

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Response papers	30%
Midterm exam	20%
Final paper	40%

Primary Texts

- Berry, Chris. ed. *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, enlarged and rev. ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1991) Chow, Ray. *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)
- Browne, Nick; Paul G. Pickowicz, eds. *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Chen, Kaige, and Tony Rayns. *King of the Children and New Chinese Cinema*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1989)
- Clark, Paul. *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987)
- Lu, Sheldon Hsiao-peng. ed. *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997)
- Monaco, James. *How to Read a Film: The Art, technology, Language, History, and Theory of Film and Media*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981)
- Rayns, Tony. "Nights at The Opera" *Sight and Sound* 2, no. 8 (1993): 10-13.
- Semsel, George S., Chen Xihe, and Xia Hong, eds. *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993)
- Tan, Ye. *From the Fifth to the Sixth Generation: An Interview with Zhang Yimou*. *Film Quarterly* Vol. 53, no. 2, Winter 1999-2000. Pp.2-13.
- Teng, Jimeng. *Foreign Literatures and Films: An Interview with Cheng Kaige*. *Foreign Literatures*. No. 2 (1996): 52-57.
- Tyler, Patrick E. "In China, Letting a Hundred Films Wither." *New York Times*, December 1, 1996, Hi, H26
- Wang, Ban. *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997)
- Wang, Jing. *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China*. (Berkeley: University of California, 1996)
- Wu Hung, Wang Huangsheng and Feng Boyi, eds. "Building on the Ruins: The Exploration of the New Urban Cinema of the 1990s," in *The First Triennial/Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art (1990-2000)* (Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China, 2002).
- Yang, Mayfair. "Of Gender, State Censorship, and Overseas Capital: An Interview with Director Zhang Yimou." *Public Culture* 5, no. 2 (1993)
- Zhang, Xudong. *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reform: Cultural Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997)

Outline of Course Content

Note: Fall/Spring students cover approximately one topic each week. During the summer, when class periods are longer, students cover approximately two topics per week.

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Topic 1 – *Chinese Cinemas: An Introduction*

Introduction to the history of Chinese cinema; political and sociocultural aspects of film in the PRC; Chinese and transnational cinema; the Chinese diaspora, cinemas of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In-class Screening: *One Hundred Year Chinese Cinema: Back to the Future*

Topic 2 – *Transition and Conversion: From Semi-feudal, Semi-colonial Society to Socialism*

Cinema as historical propaganda; the official historical narrative as conveyed in Chinese film.

In-class screening: *Lei Feng* (Dir. Dong Zhaoqi)

Topic 3 – *War and Peace on the Chinese Screen*

The war film as genre in the PRC; the CCP's use of cinema to promulgate the official mythology of CCP history.

In-class screenings: *The Tunnel Warfare* (Dir. Ren Xudong), *The Assembly* (Dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2008)

Topic 4 – *Out of the Darkness of History: The Untold Story of the Past*

Cinema at the margins of censorship; alternatives to the official CCP historical narrative; a new realism in Chinese cinema

In-class screenings: *Hibiscus Town* (Dir. Xie Jin), *Farewell, My Concubine* (Dir. Chen Kaige)

Other possible screenings: *The Blue Kite* (Dir. Tian Zhuang-zhuang), *Raise the Red Lantern* (Dir. Zhang Yimou)

Topic 5 – *Paradise Lost: the Fifth Generation as the Chinese New Wave*

Characteristics and historical context of the Fifth Generation directors; Chinese cinema takes its place in the global film market; directors begin to look overseas for audiences.

In-class screening: *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige)

Topic 6 - *Paradise Regained: Chinese Film Goes Global*

Overseas funding, marketing and distribution of Chinese film; the Hollywood-ization of Chinese cinema; Chinese movie stars become international; globalization of the martial arts genre

In-class screening: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Dir. Ang Lee)

Topic 7 – *Further Development of the Martial Arts Genre*

The genre confronts modernization; cross cultural currents in martial arts films; seeking the roots of Chinese film

In-class screenings: *Swordsmen From the Double Flag Town* (Dir. He Ping), *The Banquet* (Dir. Feng Xiaogang)

Topic 8 - *Entertaining the Public in an Age of Commercialization*

Secrets of the success of Chinese film exports; China's evolving role in the global film market; the importance of critical success; the effects of commercialization on content

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In-class Screenings: *Cell Phone* (Dir. Feng Xiaogang), *A World without Thieves* (Dir. Feng Xiaogang), *Big Shots Funeral* (Dir. Feng Xiaogang)

Topic 9 - *My Camera Doesn't Lie: the Official Beginning of the Sixth Generation*

Characteristics of the Sixth Generation directors; new developments in realism, cinema verite techniques; relaxation of censorship apparatus.

In-class Screening: *Beijing Bastards* (Dir. Zhang Yuan)

Topic 10 - *A Journey across the Post-Socialist Ruins: Li Yang and the Rise of Location Shooting*

Themes of marginalization, relocation and dislocation; rise of socially conscious film making; cinema out of the studio, location shooting and the melding of documentary and fiction.

In-class Screenings: *Blind Shaft* (Dir. Li Yang), *Xiao Wu*, *Still Life* (Dir. Jia Zhangke)

Topic 11 - *The Power of Shower: The Greening of the Sixth Generation*

Toward a cinema of urban themes and stories; Chinese film finds a new domestic audience; new international market avenues boost importance of Chinese cinema abroad.

In-class screening: *Shower* (Dir. Zhang Yang)

Topic 12 - *Chinese Film Goes Independent: A Documentary Impulse*

Increase in the role of cinema in social commentary; new themes of justice, oppression, civil society; documentary "under the radar", beyond the view of the censorship apparatus.

In-class Screenings: *Crime and Punishment*, *Please Vote for Me* (2 short films by China's new generation of Indie filmmakers)