CHINESE CINEMA SURVEY: 1980–PRESENT
FILM S142 / EALL S258
Instructor: Xueli Wang
Dates: Session B June 29th – July 31st
Meeting Times: TTh 1:00-4:15pm

Course Description:

The past four decades have been extraordinarily fruitful for Chinese-language filmmaking. This course will survey key figures, movements, and trends in Sinophone cinema since 1980. Sessions will be structured around ten films, each an entry point into a broader topic, such as the Fifth and Sixth Generation directors; the Hong Kong New Wave; New Taiwan Cinema; martial arts film; commercial blockbuster; and independent documentary. Directors of interest include Jia Zhangke, Zhang Yimou, Ang Lee, Wong Kar-Wai, Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Tsai Ming-Liang, and Wang Bing. We will examine their films formally, through shot-by-shot analysis, as well as in relation to major social, political, and economic developments in recent Chinese history, such as Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms; the Hong Kong handover; the construction of the Three Gorges Dam; and the proliferation of migrant workers in megacities. We will also consider pertinent questions of propaganda and censorship; aesthetics and politics; history and memory; transnational networks and audiences; and what constitutes "Chineseness" in a globalized world.

Screenings: Film screenings will take place during class. For most sessions, screenings will occur in the second half of class to be discussed next session; during some sessions, we may watch clips alternating with discussion.

Requirements & Grading:

Attendance & Participation: 15%
Presentations: 20%
Midterm Assignment: 25%
Final Paper: 40%

Assignments must be submitted by the due date. All late papers without legitimate excuse will be marked down ½ of a letter grade for each successive day they are not received (i.e. a paper submitted 2 days late goes from an A- to a B).

1) Attendance & Participation:
Students are expected to fully prepare for class and actively participate in discussion. Attendance is mandatory. With only ten sessions, each unexcused absence will have a significant impact on the final grade.

2) Presentations:
Students will be required to give two 5-minute in-class presentations. One of the presentations must be completed by Session 4.
One will be a presentation on an assigned reading. This should include the following components: (a) the question the book/article answers (b) a keyword or concept with a concise definition (c) sources and methodologies (d) your criticism of the reading (e) one discussion question for the class

Another will be a presentation on the previous session's film. This should include the following components: (a) background on the film, director, & context (b) show a clip less than 1 minute or up to 5 still images that you find central to the film (c) explain your choice of clip/images with an interpretation (d) one discussion question for the class.

For the midterm, students will select one film from the syllabus and write a final paper proposal. This should include: (a) background on the film, director & context (b) one key theme (c) analysis of one scene (d) tentative thesis (e) bibliography of existing scholarship. We will go over film analysis terms in class.

DUE: SESSION 5

4) Final Research Paper (6–8 pages):
For the final paper, students will write 6-8 pages on a film of their choice based on their midterm paper proposal. This paper should cover the film's formal, cultural, and historical elements, and offer an original interpretation based on formal analysis and existing scholarship. The paper will be due the day of the final session. Students are encouraged to meet with the instructor to discuss possible topics and films as early as Week 1.

DUE: SESSION 10

Academic Integrity Statement
Academic integrity and honesty are central components of a student's education, and the strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be treated lightly. You must document all of your source material. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Yale punishes academic dishonesty severely. The most common penalty is suspension from the university, but students caught plagiarizing are also subject to lowered or failing grades as well as the possibility of expulsion. Please be sure to review Yale’s Academic Integrity Policy: [http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/policies/definitions-plagiarism-cheating/](http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/policies/definitions-plagiarism-cheating/)

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Week 1: Maoist Legacy & Fifth Generation

Session 1
Course introduction and short lecture on the history of Chinese cinema. What kinds of films have defined cinema in the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan since 1976? Who are the major players (directors, writers, actors, studios, film festivals)? What are the political and economic contexts? Who are the Fifth Generation directors? What are some of their defining styles, settings, subjects, and themes?

READING:

FILM:
- Red Sorghum (Zhang Yimou, 1987)

Session 2
Discussion of Zhang Yimou's status and career as a leading figure of the Fifth Generation. How does he portray China on screen? Who was his audience? Does Zhang participate in self-exoticization and self-orientalization? How does Rey Chow situate Zhang's work in relation to issues of national identity and representation?

Watch a clip from Chen Kaige's Yellow Earth (1984).

Introduction to shot-by-shot analysis. Learn to navigate this online resource: https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/

READING:

FILM:
- Chungking Express (Wong Kar-Wai, 1994)

Week 2: Hong Kong New Wave

Session 3
Discussion of the Hong Kong New Wave. What external forces made it possible? Who were the major directors, producers, and actors? What is Ackbar Abbas's concept of "disappearance"? How does it describe Hong Kong's geopolitical position and urban culture in the 1990s? How does this "disappearance" manifest in the formal and thematic elements of Wong Kar-Wai's Chungking Express and other New Wave films? How does the Hong Kong New Wave differ from the contemporaneous Fifth Generation? What is the function of time in Chungking Express, according to David Bordwell?

Midterm assignment Q&A and brainstorm.
READING:

FILM:
  ● Song of the Exile (Ann Hui, 1990)

Session 4
PRESENTATION #1 DUE

How does Ann Hui's film embody Abbas's concept of "disappearance"? How does her film explore issues of Hong Kong identity, migration and displacement, split national allegiances, and mother-daughter relations? What are points of resonance and divergence between Hui and Wong’s visions of Hong Kong?

READING:

FILM:
  ● The Terrorizers (Edward Yang, 1986)

Week 3: New Taiwan Cinema

Session 5
MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT DUE

Discussion of New Taiwan Cinema. What external forces made it possible? Who were the major figures (directors, actors, writers)? What are some of its defining styles, settings, subjects, and themes? How does this new wave differ from those in Hong Kong and the PRC? Who was Edward Yang? How did he differ from contemporaries such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien?

Watch a clip from a Hou Hsiao-Hsien film.

READING:
Session 6
How does Taiwan New Cinema's second generation of directors such as Tsai Ming-Liang document the development of the modern city? How does Tsai's work build on and/or depart from that of Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-Hsien?

Watch a clip from a later Tsai Ming-Liang film. How has his style evolved?

READING:

FILM:
- Suzhou River (Lou Ye, 2000)

Week 4: The Urban Generation

Session 7
Who were the Sixth Generation directors? How do they differ from their Fifth Generation predecessors in terms of style, setting, subject, and theme? What external forces made their rise possible? Who is their audience? How do they compare with the new waves in Hong Kong and Taiwan?

Check in about final paper progress.

READING:

FILM:
- Still Life (Jia Zhangke, 2006)

Session 8
Who is Jia Zhangke? How does his work represent a new phase in Chinese cinema? What was the Three Gorges Dam project? How does Jia represent the relationship between individual and nation? How does his work compare with Fifth Generation directors Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige?

READING:

• Jie Li. “Home and Nation Amid the Rubble: Fei Mu’s Spring in a Small Town and Jia Zhangke’s Still Life.” Modern Chinese Literature and Culture vol. 21, no. 2 (FALL, 2009), 86-125.

FILM:

• [part of] West of the Tracks Part II: Remnants (Wang Bing, 2003)

Week 5: New Documentary; Commercial Blockbuster

Session 9

China's independent documentary movement emerged around 1989. What external forces precipitated its rise? Who were its early practitioners? What defined their work as "documentary"? What are some recurring subjects and themes? Who was their intended audience? Are there formal and thematic overlaps with the Sixth Generation?

Discussion of Wang Bing's West of The Tracks. What is Wang's approach to documentary filmmaking? What is his relationship to his subjects? How does he portray China on screen?

READING:


FILM

• Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee, 2000)

Session 10

FINAL PAPER DUE

Discussion of Ang Lee's film and Kenneth Chan's article. What is the wuxia (martial arts) genre? How have wuxia films mutated to accommodate the genre's rising popularity in Hollywood and the global film market? Which audience does Lee's film cater to?

Discussion of The Great Wall. This course begins and ends with Zhang Yimou. How has his work shifted over the last several decades? What are some continuities between Red Sorghum and Great Wall? How do the two films portray China on screen? Who is the intended audience? How does Zhang's career trajectory reflect the history of recent Chinese cinema?

READING:

FILM (Screen at beginning of class)

- *The Great Wall* (Zhang Yimou, 2016)