

CHINESE CINEMA SURVEY: 1980–PRESENT

FILM S142 / EALL S258

Meeting Times: T,Th 1-2:50pm; Session B (July 12-August 13)

Instructor: Xueli Wang

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Office Hours: by appointment

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 eleven 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. We will examine these 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 the Cultural Revolution; Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms; the Hong Kong handover; the construction of the Three Gorges Dam; and the demolition and displacement of local communities. 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.

Online Access:

- Seminars and in-class presentations will take place over Zoom. Our Zoom sessions will simulate a live classroom experience with everyone's audio and video enabled.
- All assigned films will be available to watch remotely, either on Canvas or a streaming site. During some Zoom sessions, we will watch clips together alternating with discussion.
- All required readings and PowerPoint slides and film clips will be available on Canvas.
- Office hours will take place over Zoom, after class and by appointment.

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 1/2 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 seminar discussions. Attendance is mandatory. With only ten sessions, each unexcused absence will have a significant impact on the final grade.

If a student cannot attend a particular session due to an emergency or serious illness, he or she should let the instructor know ahead of time. A student who, in the opinion of the instructor and the Dean of Summer Session, has been absent from a course to an excessive degree and without excuse may at any time be placed on Cut Restriction in that course or in all courses. A student on Cut Restriction who continues to be absent from a course may be excluded from it without credit.

Canvas discussion posts: In preparation for each class, please submit 2 bullet points consisting of quotations from the assigned reading and/or stills from the assigned film to that session's Canvas Discussion page. Each bullet point should be followed by a 1–2 sentence comment or question. These should be posted on that session's discussion page on Canvas by 11am EDT on the day of each session. For a sample post, see Discussion-> Session 1. The point of these posts is to generate discussion among your peers. You are encouraged to respond to your classmates' posts, either on Canvas or during class discussion.

2) Presentations:

Alone or in groups of two, students will be required to give **two** in-class presentations. If working with a partner, please collaborate outside of class to plan your presentation. Each student is expected to speak for at least 5 minutes per presentation. **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.

A second will be a presentation on that 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.

3) Midterm Assignment – Scene Analysis (4–5 pages) – Submit on Canvas:

For the midterm assignment, students will analyze one scene from a film on the syllabus. Your paper should: (a) identify a central issue in the film (b) select a scene that explores this issue (c) perform a shot-by-shot analysis of this scene, addressing formal aspects such as *mise-en-scène*, *cinematography*, *sound*, *editing* (d) Based on formal evidence, give an interpretation of each shot and/or the overall scene, explaining its function within the film. For a sample scene analysis, see Canvas -> Assignment -> Midterm Assignment.

This can later be used as a piece of your final paper, should you choose to write on the same film and topic.

DUE: SESSION 5

4) Final Research Paper (8–10 pages) - Submit on Canvas:

For the final paper, students will write 8–10 pages on a film from the syllabus. This paper should cover the film's formal, cultural, and historical elements, and offer an original interpretation based on formal analysis and existing scholarship. Students can incorporate a revised version of their midterm scene analysis into this paper if relevant.

This paper should include (a) background on the film, director & political, social, and/or economic context (b) one central issue or theme (c) analysis of two or more scenes that explore said issue (d) a clear thesis (e) bibliography of existing scholarship (three or more relevant scholarly texts, i.e. not Wikipedia).

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/>

Week 1: Maoist Legacy & Fifth Generation

Session 1

Who are the Fifth Generation directors? What are the social, political, and economic contexts of their work? What are some of their defining styles, settings, subjects, and themes? How does Tian's film explore national trauma and collective memory of the Mao era?

READING:

- Larson, Wendy. "The Fifth Generation: a Re-assessment." In *The Chinese Cinema Book*. Edited by Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward. London: BFI, 2011. 113–121.
- Wang, Ban. "Trauma and History in Chinese Film: Reading 'The Blue Kite' against Melodrama." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol 11, No. 1 (Spring 1999): 125–155.

FILM:

- *Blue Kite* (Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1993)

Session 2

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

Learn to navigate this online resource: <https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/>

READING:

- Chow, Rey. "The Force of Surfaces: Defiance in Zhang Yimou's Films." In *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. 143–172.
- Larson, Wendy. "Red Sorghum and the Resilience of the People." In *Zhang Yimou: Globalization and the Subject of Culture*. Amhurst, NY: Cambria Press, 2017. 41–75.
- OPTIONAL: Dai, Qing. "Raised Eyebrows for *Raise the Red Lantern*." Translated by Jeanne Tai. *Public Culture* 5 (1993): 333–337.

FILM:

- *Red Sorghum* (Zhang Yimou, 1987)

Week 2: Hong Kong New Wave

Session 3

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 Hong Kong New Wave films? How does the Hong Kong New Wave differ from the contemporaneous Fifth Generation?

Midterm assignment Q&A and brainstorm.

READING:

- Abbas, Ackbar. "The New Hong Kong Cinema and the déjà disparu" and "Wong Kar-Wai: Hong Kong Filmmaker." In *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997. 16–62.
- Bordwell, David. "Avant-Pop Cinema." In *Planet Hong Kong* 2nd edition. Madison, Wisconsin: Irvington Way Institute Press, 2011. 166–185.

FILM:

- *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-Wai, 1994)

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? How does Hui's film complicate conventional notions of "Chinese cinema"?

READING:

- Erens, Patricia. "Crossing Borders: Time, Memory, and the Construction of Identity in 'Song of the Exile.'" *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Summer, 2000): 43–59.
- Song, Hwee-Lim. "Six Chinese Cinemas in Search of a Historiography." In *The Chinese Cinema Book*. Edited by Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward. London: BFI, 2011. 35–43.

FILM:

- *Song of the Exile* (Ann Hui, 1990)

Week 3: Taiwan New Cinema

Session 5

MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT DUE

Who were the major figures of Taiwan New Cinema (directors, actors, writers)? What external forces precipitated its rise? 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 Hou Hsiao-Hsien?

READING:

- Tweedie, James. "The Urban Archipelago: Taiwan's New Wave and the East Asian Economic Boom." In *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 143–177.
- Guest, Haden. "Reflections on the Screen: Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Dust in the Wind* and the Rhythms of the Taiwan New Cinema." In *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*. Edited by Chris Berry and Feii Lu. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005. 27–37.

FILMS:

- *Dust in the Wind* (Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 1986)

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 older directors such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien?

READING:

- Tweedie, James. "The Haunting of Taipei." In *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 195–208.
- Weigel, Moira. "Neon Wave." In *n+1*. April 17, 2015.
<https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/neon-wave/>

FILM:

- *Rebels of the Neon God* (Tsai Ming-Liang, 1992)

Week 4: The Urban Generation

Session 7

Who were the Sixth Generation or Urban Generation directors? How do they differ from their Fifth Generation predecessors in terms of style, setting, subject, and theme? How do they compare with the new waves in Hong Kong and Taiwan?

Who is Jia Zhangke? How does his work represent a new phase in mainland Chinese cinema? How does *Platform* chart China's social and cultural transformation in the era of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms?

READING:

- McGrath, Jason. "The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic." In Zhang Zhen, ed., *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. 81–114.

FILM:

- *Unknown Pleasures* (Jia Zhangke, 2002)

Session 8

What was the Three Gorges Dam project? How does *Still Life* represent the relationship between individual and nation, figure and landscape? How does Jia's style compare with Zhang Yimou?

READING:

- Byrnes, Corey. *Fixing Landscape: A Techno-Poetic History of China's Three Gorges*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. "Orientation," xiii–xv; "A Record of the Trace," 165–197.

FILM:

- *Still Life* (Jia Zhangke, 2006)

Week 5: Independent Documentary; Commercial Blockbuster

Session 9

China's independent documentary movement emerged around 1989. What external forces precipitated its rise? What defined their work as "documentary"? What are some recurring subjects and themes? How do films like *Meishi Street* constitute an "alternative archive" of post-socialist China?

READING:

- Berry, Chris and Lisa Rofel. "Alternative Archive: China's Independent Documentary Culture." In Chris Berry et al. eds.; *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record*. Hong Kong University Press. 2010. 135–54.
- Edwards, Dan. "Demolition, Documentary and the Politics of Minjian on Contemporary Chinese Screens." In *Cultural Studies Review* 23, no.1 (2017): 118-128.

FILM:

- *Meishi Street* (Ou Ning, 2006)

Session 10

FINAL PAPER DUE

What is the *wuxia* (martial chivalry/swordplay) 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?

This course begins and ends with Zhang Yimou. How has his work shifted over the last several decades? What are some continuities and divergences between *Red Sorghum* and *The Great Wall*?

READING:

- Chan, Kenneth. "The Global Return of the *Wuxia pian* (Chinese Sword-Fighting Movie)." In *Remade in Hollywood*. 75–103.

FILMS:

- *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000)
- *The Great Wall* (Zhang Yimou, 2016) [Excerpt]