

# HN 390. Chinese Film: A Window on China

## Syllabus

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**Class times:** Tues 9:20-12:00, Thurs 10:20-12:00.

**Required text:** Gary G. Xu, *Sinascapes: Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, Rowman & Littlefield Pub, Maryland, 2007.

**Recommended text:** H. Kong and J Lent, *One Hundred Years of Chinese Cinema*, Eastbridge Pub., Norwalk, CT, 2005

**Course Description and Objectives:** This course will use film to introduce students to China's rich culture, values, and history. We will consider the question of whether there is a uniquely Chinese style of filmmaking and how that might differ in style, aesthetic, and financing from the Hollywood model. Class time will be spent watching recent films from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, as well as discussing the relevance of the themes raised in these films both for Chinese and American audiences.

Students will regularly write response papers to the films viewed in and out of class. Papers should be one to two pages in length and discuss the film's form (editing, mise-en-scene, sound, and color), narrative (story and plot), and themes. For each film, the instructor will provide a list of possible questions to consider so that students will have a framework for beginning their responses. Students are not expected to answer all of the suggested questions in the paper.

**Grades:** Grades will be based on the response papers (50%), final project and presentation (30%), and class participation (20%). To receive full credit for participation, students will be expected to attend and participate in class. It is the instructor's responsibility to insure that each student has an opportunity to speak in class and it is the student's responsibility to come to class prepared.

Details about the final project will be distributed separately.

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Assignments are listed by due date. However, I recommend that you not read critiques of particular films until after you have seen the film so that you can develop your own ideas. The year listed for each film is the year it was first released; release in the US typically follows by one or more years. The list of films and readings is tentative and may change

**January 13, 2008. Introduction to China.** Why are you taking this class? What do you know about China? Power point of 2002 trip to Shanghai and Beijing by Arcadia students and faculty; intro to Pinyin; Chinese attributes: stereotypes or authentic cultural differences?

**January 15: Introduction to film and Chinese film.** Aspects of film: narrative, plot, mise-en-scene, editing, color/lighting, sound, acting; intro to Chinese film.

**Assignment:** Read *Sinascape* Introduction

**January 20. Chinese History Part I: to 1850**

Assignment: Read articles on Chinese current events in

<http://nytimes.com/asia>

<http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/>

<http://english.CCTV.com>

Look at links to Chinese film resources at end of bibliography

**January 22. Chinese History Part 2: 1850-present**

**Assignment:** Read *Diary of a Madman* by Lu Xun (Hsun), which will be on reserve.

**January 27. *Yellow Earth* (1984). Director: Chen Kaige**

**Assignment:** Read *Sinascape* Chapter 1. (Note: This chapter will not be discussed until February 12.)

Prepare for a short quiz on Chinese history (which will be counted as a response paper.)

**January 29. Class discussion of *Yellow Earth* and quiz on Chinese history.**

**Assignment:** Response paper to *Yellow Earth*. (Will not be graded.)

**February 3. *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991). Director: Zhang Yimou**

**Assignment:** Read "Symbolism through Zhang Yimou's Subversive Lens in His Early Films," by H. Kong in *One Hundred Years of Chinese Cinema* by Kong and Lent.

**February 5. Class discussion on *Raise the Red Lantern*.**

**Assignment:** Response paper to *Raise the Red Lantern*.

**February 10. *Hero* (2002). Director: Zhang Yimou.**

**Assignment:** Watch *The Emperor and the Assassin* by Chen Kaige

**February 12: Class discussion of *Hero*.**

**Assignment:** Response paper to *Hero* and *The Emperor and the Assassin*.

**February 17 *Devils on the Doorstep* (2000). Director: Jiang Wen**

**Assignment:** Read *Sinascape* Chapter 2.

**February 19. Class discussion of *Devils on the Doorstep*.**

**Assignment:** Response paper to *Devils on the Doorstep*.

**February 24. *Suzhou River* (2000). Director: Lou Ye**

**Assignment:** Read Interview with Lou Ye in *One Hundred Years of Chinese Cinema*. Read *Sinascape* Chapter 3.

**February 26. Class discussion of *Suzhou River*.**

**Assignment:** Response paper to *Suzhou River* and Lou Ye.

**March 3. *Still Life* (2006). Director: Jia Zhang-ke**

**Assignment:** Re-write response paper to *Suzhou River*.

**March 5. Discussion on *Still Life*.**

**Assignment:** Response paper to *Still Life*

**March 10. *Chungking Express* (1996). Director: Wong Kar-Wei**

**Assignment:** Watch interview with Wong Kar-Wei posted on Blackboard. Watch power point on Hong Kong films posted on Blackboard.

**March 12. Class discussion on *Chungking Express* and Hong Kong film.**

**Assignment:** No response paper due, but be prepared to discuss *Chungking Express*. Final project title and abstract due. (See details on separate hand-out.)

**Vacation Week: No class March 17, 19.**

**March 24. *Infernal Affairs* (2002). Directors: Lau Wai-Keung and Mak Sui-Fe**

**Assignment:** Watch *The Departed* (2006), directed by Martin Scorsese.

**March 26. Class discussion comparing *Infernal Affairs* and *The Departed*.**

**Assignment:** Response paper comparing the two films.

**March 31. *Three Times* (2005). Director: Hou Hsiou-Hsien**

**Assignment:** Read posted article on Hou Hsiao-Hsien on my.arcadia. Read power point on Taiwan Film on my.arcadia.

**April 2. *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994). Director: Ang Lee. Class will meet 9:20-12:00**

**Assignment:** Prepare for class discussion on *Three Times*

**April 7. Film to be determined.**

**Assignment:** Outline of Final Project due. Outline should contain enough detail so that your approach is clear and should contain the names of the films you will analyze.

**April 9. Class discussion of *Eat Drink Man Woman***

**Assignment:** Response paper to *Eat Drink Man Woman* and the film shown on April 7<sup>th</sup>.

**April 14. *A World Without Thieves* (2004). Director: Feng Xiaogang.**

**Assignment:** Read Postscript to *Sinascape*

**April 16. Wrap up discussion of Chinese Film.**

**April 21: Individual meetings to discuss final project.**

**April 23: No class**

**Assignment:** First draft of Final Project Due noon.

**May 5: Final presentations. 9:00am- 12:00. Room to be announced.**

**Final project due.**

## **Suggestions for possible final project titles**

These are only suggestions; you are welcome to develop your own project. Disclaimer: some of these films have violent scenes and others contain semi-explicit sex. Please choose films you are comfortable with.

1. Female Chinese Directors, possibly including Sylvia Chang, Ann Hui, Li Yu, Clara Law, Li Shaohong.
2. The image of women in Chinese film: *20 30 40*, *Life Show*, *Shanghai Dreams*, *The Story of Qui Ju*, *Ju Dou*.
3. Chinese depictions of the Japanese occupation: *Purple Butterfly*, *Chinese Connection*, *Lust Caution*, *Devils on the Doorstep*, *Nanking*, *Cape No. 7*
4. Confucian/family relationships in an era of changing values: *Sunflower*, *Drifter*, *Shanghai Dreams*
5. Chinese film as an extension of Chinese art: Hou Hsiou-Hsien,
6. The influence of Bruce Lee
7. Films of Wong Kar-Wei: *Fallen Angels*, *In the Mood for Love*, *2046*, *Ashes of Time Redux*
8. Documentary-like films: *Blind Shaft*, *Blind Mountain*, *Still Life*
9. Alienation in the films of 6<sup>th</sup> generation directors: the films of Zhang Yuan, Jia Zhang-Ke, Wang Xiaoshuai, Lou Ye.
10. Zhang Yimou's early films
11. Zhang Yimou's recent films
12. The business of Chinese films
13. Hong Kong gangster films of Johnnie To and John Woo: *Election*, *A Better Tomorrow*, *Red Cliff*
14. Sex in Chinese language films: *Lust Caution*, *Summer Palace*, *The Wayward Cloud*, *Eros*
15. Male homosexuality in Chinese films: *East Palace West Palace*, *The River*
16. Lesbians in Chinese films: *Fish and Elephant*, *Drifting Flowers*, *20 30 40*
17. Musical theater in Chinese language films: *All About Women*, *Perhaps Love*.
18. The Cultural Revolution in film: *To Live*, *Farewell My Concubine*.

## Bibliography of Recommended Films and Books on Chinese Film Criticism

Many, but not all, of these films and books are available in Arcadia's Landman Library or from Louis Friedler

### Films

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Generation:

*The Opium War* (1997) –Xie Jin

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Generation

*To Live* (1994)- Zhang Yimou

*Raise the Red Lantern* – Zhang Yimou

*Ju Dou*- Zhang Yimou

*Not One Less* (1999)- Zhang Yimou

*Story of Qiu Ju* (1992)- Zhang Yimou

*Hero* (2004)- Zhang Yimou

*House of Flying Daggers* (2005)- Zhang Yimou

*Farewell My Concubine* (1993)- Chen Kaige

*The Emperor and the Assassin* (1999)- Chen Kaige

*Yellow Earth* – Chen Kaige

*Postmen in the Mountains* (1999) -Hou Jianqi.

*Life Show* (2004)- Hou JianQi

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Generation

*Purple Butterfly* (2003)- Lou Ye

*Summer Palace* (2007)- Lou Ye

*Suzhou River* (2000)- Lou Ye

*Sunflower* (2005) Zhang Yuan

*East Palace West Palace* (1998) – Zhang Yuan

*The World* (2004)- Jia Zhang-ke

*Platform*- Jia Zhang-Ke

*Unknown Pleasures*- Jia Zhang-Ke

*Shanghai Dreams* (2005)- Wang Xiaoshuai

*Beijing Bicycle* (2001)- Wang Xiaoshuai

*Drifters* (2003)- Wang Xiaoshuai

*In Love We Trust* (2008)- Wang Xiaoshuai

*The Sun Also Rises*- (2008) Jiang Wen

*Devils on the Doorstep* – Jiang Wen

*Blind Shaft* (2003)- Li Yang

*Blind Mountain* (2005)- Li Yang

#### Female Mainland Directors

*Lost in Beijing* (2008)- Li Yu

*Fish and Elephants*- Li Yu

*Dam Street*- Li Yu  
*Stolen Life*- Li Shaohong

### **Other Mainland Directors**

*Tuya's Marriage* (2008)- Wang Quan An

### **Taiwan**

*20 30 40* (2004)- Sylvia Chang  
*Lust Caution* (2007) – Ang Lee  
*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000)- Ang Lee  
*July Rhapsody* (2001)– Ann Hui  
*Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2004) Tsai Ming-Liang  
*Millennium Mambo* (2004)- Hou Hsiou-Hsien  
*Three Times* (2005)- Hou Hsiou-Hsien  
*All About Women*- Tsai Hark

### **Hong Kong**

*In the Mood for Love* (2000)- Wong Kar-Wei  
*Ashes of Time Redux* (1994/2009)- Wong Kar-Wei  
*Chungking Express*- Wong Kar Wei  
*Fallen Angels* –Wong Kar Wei  
*Election* (2005) Johnnie To  
*A Better Tomorrow*- John Woo  
*Red Cliff* (2008)- John Woo  
*Fist of Fury/=Chinese Connection* (US title) (1972)- Bruce Lee (actor)  
*Kung Fu Hustle* (2004)- Stephen Chow  
*Autumn Moon* (1992)- Clara Law  
*Warlords*- Peter Chan  
*Perhaps Love*- Peter Chan  
*Drunken Master*- Jackie Chan  
*Infernal Affairs* (2002)- Lau Wai-Keung and Mak Sui-Fe

### **Documentaries about China**

*Up The Yangtze* (2008)–Yung Chang (Canadian)  
*From Mao to Mozart/ Musical Encounters* (1982/2002)- with Isaac Stern (American)  
*China: The People's Republic of Capitalism* (July 2008)  
*Secrets of China's First Emperor : Tyrant and Visionary* (2008)

### **Books on Chinese Film Criticism.**

Berry, Chris and Farquhar, Mary, *China on Screen*  
Berry, Chris, *Chinese Films in Focus II*  
Chow, Rey, *Primitive Passion: Visuality, sexuality, ethnography, and contemporary Chinese cinema*  
Chow, Rey, *Sentimental Fabulations*  
Curtain, Michael, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV.* (2007)  
Donald, Stephanie, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces- Cinema and Civility in China*  
Kong, Haili and Lent, John, *One Hundred Years of Chinese Cinema*

Kuosha, Harry H, *Celluloid China, Cinematic Encounters with Culture and Society* (2002)  
Lu, Sheldon, *Transnational Chinese Cinema*  
Lu. Sheldon and Yeh, Emilie Yueh-yu, *Chinese Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*  
Pickowicz, Paul and Zhang, Yingjin , *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*  
Yeh, Emile Yueh-yu and Davis, Darrell W., *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island*.  
Zhang, Zhen *The Urban Generation*  
Zhang, Yingyin, *Chinese National Cinema*

## **Links to Chinese Film Resources**

<http://newton.uor.edu/Departments&Programs/AsianStudiesDept/china-film.html>

<http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/igcs/igfilm.htm>

Top 10 films of 2008:

<http://www.cctv.com/program/cultureexpress/20081226/108522.shtml>

To purchase Chinese DVDs:

<http://www.yesasia.com/us/en/home.html>

<http://moviesville.com>