

## CHIN 3270: Chinese Film

### Course description

This course offers an overview of Chinese film from the silent era to the present. We will also use films to provide an introduction to China's rich culture, values and history. We will screen a selection of internationally acclaimed Chinese films. We will place each film in historical context, considering both the aesthetic form and the socio-political content of the film. Class time will be spent watching 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 audience.

The fundamental question of the continuity between the cultural tradition and socio-economic organization of the past and the elements of change and "modernity" in the present will accompany us during the course. This theme will be developed in the context of the different historical periods. The main concern of our discussions and the proposed topics for research will be:

- The role of gender in Chinese society;
- The cinematic critiques of Maoism and post-Maoist Chinese culture.
- The Chinese-language film's representation of the nation, national identity, national trauma, and the national past;
- The Chinese film's representation of its increasingly diversified cultural landscapes at home and abroad

### Course objectives

- To gain cultural knowledge of China through the screenings of Chinese films;
- To understand how film represents the different cultural orientations in different periods of time in China;
- To learn how to critically "read" a movie and appreciate the elements that make up the visual and aural languages of films

### Course organization

Starting from week two, we will cover a film every two class meetings. On the first day, a film will be shown during class time, followed by a brief discussion of the historical background related to the film.

On the second day, a student will give a five-minute presentation about the movie. The presentation will include a brief introduction of the movie (less than one minute), and focus on one aspect of your interest (editing, sound, color, narrative, or theme).

As you watch the films and do your readings, you are expected to make your own notes/summary so that you can develop your own ideas, write your reaction paper, and participate in class discussion.

Students will write **FIVE** reaction papers to the films. Reaction papers should be at least two pages, double space, and discuss the film's form (editing, mise-en-scene, sound, and color), narrative (story and plot), and themes. For each film, the instructor may or may

not provide some questions to consider so that students will have a framework for beginning their responses.

Readings will be assigned for some films. I recommend that you do not read any critiques until after you have seen the film and have written your reaction appears, if any, so that you can develop your own ideas.

**Format:** Lecture, class discussion, small group discussion, and oral presentations

**Final research paper:** Minimum 10 pages, double space, on some aspect of Chinese films.

### **Grading**

Reaction paper: 50%;  
Final project and presentation: 30%;  
Oral presentation: 10%;  
Class participation and attendance: 10%

### **Weekly schedules** (Subject to change)

**Week 1:** Syllabus and self-introduction. Introduction to modern Chinese history

**Week 2:** Film language and writing about films

External web sources: [Yale Film Studies Film Analysis Website](http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/)  
<http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/>

**Week 2:** Virtue, gender and nation (**Reaction paper 1 about *Goddess* due next class**)

Screening: *The Goddess* (1934; dir. Wu Yonggang). Click [here to view an online version of the film](#), without the musical score.

**Week 3:** Virtue, gender and nation

Discussion of *The Goddess* & Women's status in China

**Week 3:** Virtue, gender and nation

**Screening:** *Raise the Red Lantern* □ 1991, dir. Zhang Yimou □

**Week 4:** Virtue, gender and nation

Discussion of *Raise the Red Lantern* & The Fifth Generation of Filmmakers in China

Readings:

1. Young, John Dragon, 1993. Review of *Raise the Red Lantern* by Zhang Yimou; *The Story of Qiuju* by Zhang Yimou. *The American Historical Review*, 98, 4: 1158-1161.
2. Ye, Tan and Zhang, Yimou, 1999-2000. From the Fifth to the Sixth Generation: An Interview with Zhang Yimou. *Film Quarterly*, 53, 2: 2-13.

**Week 4:** Virtue, gender and nation (**Reaction paper 2 due next class**)

Screening: [The Story of Qiuju](#)

**Week 5:** Virtue, gender and nation

Discussion of the *The Story of Qiuju* and Chinese women in films

Reading: Berry and Farquhar, 2006. *How should a Chinese woman look?*

**Week 6:** War and National unity

Screening: [Red Sorghum](#) (1987; dir. Zhang Yimou)

**Week 6:** War and National unity

Discussion of *Red Sorghum*

1. (Optional) Chien, Cheng-Chen and Lo, Rey-Chih. 2007. *Red Sorghum*: Image as narrative mediator between humans and nature. *Asian Journal of Management and Humanity Sciences*, 2, 1-4: 74-88.
2. Zhang, Jia-Xuan. 1989. Review of *Red Sorghum*. *Film Quarterly*, 42, 3: 41-43
3. External web sources: [The Nanjing Atrocities: Online Documentary](#)<http://journalism.missouri.edu/~jschool/nanking/index.htm>

**Week 7 :** Masculinity and martial art (Kung-fu) (**Reaction paper 3 due next class**)

Screening: [Hero](#) (2002, dir. Zhang Yimou)

**Week 7:** Masculinity and martial art (Kung-fu)

Discussion of *Hero*, China's first emperor, and Martial art movies in Hong Kong

In-class screening: clips of films by Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan

Readings:

1. (Optional) Lu and Yeh. 2005. *Fists of legend*.
2. Nylan, Michael. 2005. Review of *Hero*. *The American Historical Review*, 110, 3: 769-770.
3. Berry and Farquhar. 2006. *How should Chinese men act?*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIWf9ghLF98> (Bruce Lee, □□□□)

**Week 8** Globalization and identity

Screening: [Crouching Tiger, Hidden Tiger](#) (2000; dir. Ang Lee)

**Week 8:** Globalization and identity (*Research proposal due in class*)

Discussion of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Tiger*

1. Klein, Christina. 2004. "Crouching tiger, hidden dragon": A diasporic reading. *Cinema Journal*, 43, 4: 18-42.
2. External web sources: [The Globalization Website](#); [Commanding Heights: The Battle for the World Economy](#) (PBS series website)

**Week 9: Spring break**

**Week 10:** Roots and cultural critique (**Reaction paper 4 due in class**)

Screening: [Yellow Earth](#) (1984; dir. Chen Kaige)

**Week 10 (March 27):** Roots and cultural critique

Discussion of *Yellow Earth*.

Reading: Esther C. M. Yau: Yellow earth western analysis and a non-western text. In Chris Berry (eds.). *Perspectives on Chinese cinema*. London: British Film Institute.

**Week 11:** TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Screening: [Blue Kite](#) (1993, dir. Tian Zhuangzhuang)

**Week 11:** TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Discussion of *Blue Kite* & pre-cultural revolution

**Week 12:** TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Screening: [To live](#) (1994, dir, Zhang Yimou)

**Week 12:** TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Discussion of *To Live*

**Week 13:** TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Screening: [Farewell My Concubine](#) (1993, dir. Chen Kaige)

**Week 14:** TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Discussion of *Farewell My Concubine*, & Homosexuality in China

Reading: Lau, Jenny Kwok Wah. 1995. "Farewell my Concubine": History, melodrama, and ideology in contemporary Pan-Chinese cinema. *Film Quarterly*, 49, 1: 16-27.

**Week 14:** Sixth generation: Social themes and Chinese avant-garde (**Reaction paper due next class**)

Screening: [Platform](#) (2005, dir. Jia Zhangke)

**Week 15** □ Sixth generation: Social themes and Chinese avant-garde

Discussion of *Platform* & the Sixth Generation

**Week 15: Student presentation, and course wrap-up**

Each student will prepare a ten-minute presentation on their final project.