DEPARTMENT OF FILM STUDIES

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, LINGUISTICS AND FILM

QUEEN MARY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

FLM6210 CINEMAS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

2022- 2023



MODULE HANDBOOK

CONVENOR: DR. KIKI TIANQI YU

Semester A | Level 6 | 15 Credits

Lecture and Seminar: Thursday 11:00-13:00 hr.

**DESCRIPTION**

Taking contemporary Chinese cinema and moving image as case studies, this module

examines the concepts of world cinema, global auteurs, generational cinema, independent

cinema, the national and the transnational, as well as localized genres and aesthetics in non-

Western cinema. While the People's Republic of China (PRC) is now the world's second largest film industry in terms of revenue, as perhaps befits its putative status as the world's

largest economy, cinema and moving image culture are increasingly transnational,

collaborative, multi-platform. This course explores both the commercial cinema and the independent practices. It will mainly examine the practices in mainland China since the 1980s, but the practices in Taiwan and Hong Kong will also be discussed, to problematise notions of national, regional, transnational and world cinema.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Students on the module can expect to

• engage critically with debates in the field of Chinese cinemas, world cinema, different

forms of independent cinema and art cinema, and put them in productive use.

• make critical judgements in the understanding and evaluation of a variety of film practices in contemporary China.

• understand film practices and cinema culture in China as they have emerged historically and appreciate the processes through which they have come into being, with reference to social, political, cultural and technological change.

• draw and reflect upon the relevance and impact of their own cultural commitments and positioning to the film festival programming practice.

• employ appropriate methods, theories and resources for exploring a research question.

• collate, critically evaluate and understand a variety of research material within and beyond academic literature.

**ASSESSMENTS**

1. **Group project 25%:**

Two or three students work in a group to curate a film festival programme on a specific theme (discuss with the lecturer). Write a 1000 words programme note, plus the festival schedule and design a poster. The programme note must address: What is the theme? Why do you choose it? What is your selection of films or directors? How will they be presented: how many days/sections and ideal venue? Are you planning to design extra activities to accompany the programme to further engage the audience? If so, what are they?

DEADLINE: 18 December 2022 Sunday 11:55pm

1. **Individual essay (3000 words) 75%:**

To analyse one film screened in class and you must choose one of the themes covered in the module as the framework and engage with two key notions discussed in class. It is to demonstrate your skills in research, textual and contextual analysis, and scholarly argumentation.

DEADLINE: 6 January 2023 Friday 11:55pm

Notes on referencing: Please ensure you follow the guidelines on referencing and writing a

bibliography set out in section 5.2 of the SLLF Undergraduate Handbook.

All students must ensure that they obtain a copy of the School Handbook for

Undergraduate Students – http://qmplus.qmul.ac.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=314648 –

and follow the School’s guidelines and regulations in all matters regarding this module.

**WEEKLY OUTLINE**

**Week 1: Introduction: Chinese Cinemas and its history**

The first week will examine how cinemas in contemporary China problematise the concepts of ‘national cinema’, ‘world cinema’, and discuss different approaches to understand the so-called ‘Chinese cinema’. It will also provide a brief history of Chinese cinemas and explore how to understand cinemas in contemporary China in relation to its multi-layered film, cultural and political histories.

**Screening: *Return to Dust*, dir. Li Ruijun, 2022**

Link to the film (eng subtitled): <https://www.dandanzan10.top/dianying/105218.html>

(A Chinese online viewing platform)

**Additional viewing:** *Spring in a small town*, dir. Fei Mu, 1948

Link:<https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/0A43CB66?bcast=116027932>

Login to Box of Broadcast through searching institution QMUL.

**Reading:**

Ewa Mazierska, “World cinema, third cinema”, in*Studies in World Cinema* 1 (2020) 14-21.

Jessica Kiang, “‘Return to Dust’ Review: A Compassionate but Cautious Chinese Drama of Rural Lives Ennobled by Sacrifice” in *Variety*, 13 Feb 2022.

<https://variety.com/2022/film/reviews/return-to-dust-review-yin-ru-chen-yan-1235175393/>

**Additional reading:**

Zhang, Zhen. “An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: The Actress As Vernacular

Embodiment in Early Chinese Film Culture”, *Camera Obscura*, 48 (Volume 16, Number 3),

2001, pp. 228-263.

Paul Clark, “Artists, Cadres, and Audiences: Chinese Socialist Cinema, 1949-1979” in *A*

*Companion to Chinese Cinema*, edited by Zhang, Yingjin. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

**Week 2: Generational filmmakers, world cinema and global auteurs 1**

This week will discuss the 5th generation director emerged in the 1980s. It will explore the notion of generational cinema in China within the context of world cinema and the production of global auteurs by international film festivals.

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

**Reading:**

Elsaesser, Thomas. ‘The Global Author: Control, Creative Constraints and Performative Self

Contradiction’ in *The Global Auteur: The Politics of Authorship in 21st Century Cinema*,

Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Reynaud, Berenice.  “China on the set with Zhang Yimou” in *Sight & Sound (inc. Monthly Film Bulletin)* Volume: 1 Issue 3 (1991) ISSN: 0037-4806 Online ISSN: 2515-5164

<https://reader-exacteditions-com.ezproxy.library.qmul.ac.uk/issues/58124/spread/29>

Tan Ye and Zhang Yimou, “From the Fifth to the Sixth Generation: An Interview with Zhang Yimou” in *Film Quarterly*, Winter, 1999-2000, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Winter, 1999-2000), pp. 2-13.

**Week 3: Generational filmmakers, world cinema and global auteurs 2**

This week will explore works by the 6th generation directors, led by Wang Xiaoshuai, Jiang

Wen, Lou Ye and Jia Zhangke. It will examine how their cinema differs from the previous

generation in terms of themes and aesthetics. It will also contextualise their films within the local underground and independent cinema, in relation to censorship and film policy.

**Screening:** *Still Life,* dir. Jia Zhangke, 2016

**Reading:**

Cecília Mello, “Landscape painting, Chinese philosophy and the aesthetic innovation of *Still Life*“ in *The cinema of Jia Zhangke : realism and memory in Chinese film,*Bloomsbury Academic, 2019

<https://www-screenstudies-com.ezproxy.library.qmul.ac.uk/encyclopedia-chapter?docid=b-9781350122154&tocid=b-9781350122154-chapter5&pdfid=9781350122154.ch-005.pdf>

Zhang, Yingjin. “Rebel without a Cause? China’s New Urban Generation and Postsocialist

Filmmaking.” In *The Urban Generation Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the*

*Twenty-first Century*, edited by Zhang Zhen, 49-80. Durham and London: Duke University

Press, 2007.

**Additional reading:**

Berry, Michael. *Jia Zhangke's 'Hometown Trilogy': Xiao Wu, Platform, Unknown Pleas*ures.

Bloomsbury Academic, 2009.

**Week 4: Local blockbusters, national sentiments and identities**

This week will focus on the rise of local film industry and productions of local blockbusters.

Taking Feng Xiaogang’s New Year films and Zhang Yimou’s martial art cinema as

examples, it will discuss how local blockbusters aim to construct national identity and create

national sentiments. It will also discuss recent new forms of main-melody films and the first successful blockbuster sci-fi *Wandering Earth* (2019).

**Screening:** *Youth*, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2017

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiEt84r_3io>

**Reading:**

Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh & Darrell William Davis (2008) “Re-nationalizing China's film

industry: case study on the China Film Group and film marketization”, *Journal of Chinese*

*Cinemas*, 2:1, 37-51, DOI: 10.1386/jcc.2.1.37\_1

Zhu, Ying. “New Year Film as Chinese Blockbuster: From Feng Xiaogang’s Contemporary

Urban Comedy to Zhang Yimou’s Period Drama” in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese*

*Cinema*, edited by Ying Zhu, Stanley Rosen, Hong Kong University Press, 2010.

**Additional reading:**

Rosen, Stanley. “Film and Society in China: The Logic of the Market”, in *A Companion to*

*Chinese Cinema*, edited by Yingjing Zhang, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Lu, Yi. “The malling of the movies: Film exhibition reforms, multiplexes, and film

consumption in the new millennium in urban China”, in *Journal of Chinese*

*Cinemas*, 10:3, 205-227, 2016. DOI: 10.1080/17508061.2016.1163883

**Week 5: Independent Documentary 1: personal Filmmaking as social engagement**

This week will focus on an essential part of Chinese independent cinema - independent

documentary that emerged at the end of 1980s. The availability of DV camera on the retail

market in the late 1990s has made documentary filmmaking accessible to individual amateurs

and largely facilitated the long repressed personal filmmaking. We will discuss

independent documentary as personal expression and social engagement in the still politically

repressed China.

**Screening:** *Nostalgia*, dir. Shu Haolun, 2003

**Reading:**

Yu, Kiki Tianqi. “Nostalgia toward Laojia: Old Home as an Imagined Past” in *'My' Self on*

*Camera: First Person Documentary Practice in an Individualising China*, Edinburgh:

University of Edinburgh Press, 2019

Edwards, Dan. “From Underground Practice to Alternative Public Sphere” in *Independent*

*Chinese Documentary: Alternative Visions*, Alternative Publics, Edinburgh: University of

Edinburgh Press, 2015.

**Week 6: Independent Documentary 2: modes of productions**

This week will continue the discussion on independent documentary with a special attention to the diversifying production modes in the context of global documentary filmmaking network.

**Screening:** *China’s van Goghs,* dir. Haibo Yu & Kiki Tianqi Yu, 2016

**Reading:** Camille Deprez, Judith Pernin. “Introduction” in *Post-1990 Documentary: Reconfiguring Independence*, Edinburgh University Press, 2015

Kiki Tianqi Yu, “Three Modes of Independent Creative Documentary Production and the Rise of the Industrial Mode” in *Chinese Independent Cinema,* edited by Chris Berry et al. University of Amsterdam Press, 2023.

**Week 7 Study week**

No classes

**Week 8: Women’s cinema and the rise of arthouse cinema**

This week will discuss contemporary women’s cinema in the context of recent rise of arthouse cinema and film auteurs after the Sixth-Generation filmmakers. Cinema by women presents a valuable perspective on gender, sexuality, history, culture, society, and demonstrates interesting forms of aesthetic experimentation. The development of local independent production companies that aim to produce new auteurs provide mechanism for more young directors including women to emerge.

**Screening:** *Spring Tide*, dir. Yang Lina, 2019

<https://www.dandanzan10.top/dianying/63875.html>

**Reading:**

Wang, Lingzhen. “Chinese Women’s Cinema”, in *A Companion to Chinese Cinema*, edited

by Zhang, Yingjin. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012

Clarence Tsui, “Chinese Director Yang Lina: ‘China is getting more Patriarchal’” in *Hollywood Reporter*, 1 April 2013. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/chinese-director-yang-lina-china-431966/

**Week 9: Transnational Chinese cinema and co-productions**

This week will explore Chinese cinema in the transnational context. It will discuss

transregional Sinophone film co-productions within East Asia, as well as China’s

collaboration with Hollywood. Special attention will be paid to how transnational cinema

gives rise to Chinese stars on the global stage, how PRC’s film censorship affects the Hollywood, and PRC’s ambition to strengthen its soft power through cinema.

**Screening:** *Hero*, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2004

**Reading:**

Berry, C. (2010), ‘What is transnational cinema? Thinking from the Chinese situation’,

*Transnational Cinemas* 1: 2, pp. 111–127, doi: 10.1386/trac.1.2.111\_1

Weiying Peng & Michael Keane (2019) China’s soft power conundrum, film coproduction,

and visions of shared prosperity, International Journal of Cultural Policy, 25:7, 904-916,

DOI: 10.1080/10286632.2019.1634062

**Additional readings:**

Berry, Chris. “Transnational Chinese Cinema Studies”, in The Chinese Cinema Book, edited

by Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward, BFI, 2017.

Yuxing Zhou (2015) Pursuing soft power through cinema: censorship and double standards

in mainland China, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 9:3, 239-252, DOI:

10.1080/17508061.2015.1049878

**Week 10: Ethnic minority films**

This week will explore ethnic minority films through a case study of Tibetan filmmaker Pema Tseden.

**Screening:** *Tharlo*, dir. Pema Tseden, 2017

**Reading:**

Grewal, Anup. “Contested Tibetan landscapes in the films of Pema Tseden”*, Journal of*

*Chinese Cinemas*, 10:2,135-149, 2016. DOI: 10.1080/17508061.2016.1167336

Berry, Chris. “Pema Tseden and the Tibetan road movie: space and identity beyond the

‘minority nationality film’, in *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 10:2, 89-105, 2016.

DOI: 10.1080/17508061.2016.1167334

**Week 11: Conclusion and Artist moving images in gallery spaces**

This week will review the themes and concepts covered in the prevous weeks, with an expanded attention to films in art spaces, or artist moving image by well-known Chinese

contemporary artist-filmmakers including Yang Fudong and Zhao Liang.

**Screening:**

The Fifth Night, dir. Yang Fudong, 2010

<https://publicdelivery.org/yang-fudong-the-fifth-night/>

First Spring, dir. Yang Fudong. 2010.

<https://www.shortoftheweek.com/2010/01/18/first-spring/>

**Readings:**

Berry, Chris. “The New Gestural Cinema: Yang Fudong and the Gallery Film”, in *Film*

*Quarterly*, Vol. 67 No. 3, Spring 2014. pp. 17-29. DOI: 10.1525/fq.2014.67.3.17

Gladston, Paul. ‘Somewhere (and Nowhere) between Modernity and Tradition: Towards a

Critique of International and Indigenous Perspectives on the Significance of Contemporary

Chinese Art’, in *Tate Papers*, no.21, Spring, 2014

**Additional reading:**

Dong, Bingfeng. “Cinema of Exhibition: Film in Chinese Contemporary Art.” In China’s

iGeneration. Cinema and Moving Image Culture for the Twenty-First Century, edited by M.

D.Johnson, K. B. Wagner, K. T. Yu, and L. Volpiani, 73–88. Bloomsbury, 2014.

Elena Pollacchi (2019) Porous circuits: Tsai Ming-liang, Zhao Liang, and Wang Bing at the

Venice International Film Festival and the interplay between the festival and the art

exhibition circuits, Journal of Chinese Cinemas, 13:2, 130-146, DOI:

10.1080/17508061.2019.1665239