

Politics of Chinese Cinema

GO 338/Colby College

Spring 2005
Tuesday 7:00-9:30 p.m.

Professor Walter Hatch

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Office Hours:

W 10-11:30; Th 1:30-3

Miller 258

Course description:

This is not a course on film technique, even though it might be helpful to know a “dead screen” from a “montage.” Nor is it a course on postmodernism, even though it might be useful to understand some of the theory (and jargon) deployed in a few of the readings. Rather, this is a course on politics – one that uses the visual medium of film to analyze a) the relationship between state and society in Greater China (consisting of the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan); b) the political economy of cultural representation in Greater China; and c) the politics of identity in Greater China.

We will examine state censorship of the film industry on the mainland, the transnational networks of finance and distribution that have allowed Chinese filmmakers to circumvent the political regime in Beijing, the increasing commercialization of film production in Greater China, and the impact of globalization (“Hollywood-ization”) on the film industry there. Above all, however, we will focus on the fact that “Chinese” cinema has been, until quite recently, a politically contested category made up of three overlapping but often distinct perspectives from the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, with each perspective attempting to define and claim for itself a common cultural space (“the motherland” or “the nation”). We will try to understand these competing perspectives, and will analyze the political motivations and implications associated with the act of using the public domain (the movie theater) to envision and represent a particular community.

Class format:

All readings are in English; all films are subtitled in English. When we are not watching a film, I will lecture (using film clips) and then lead a discussion on the lecture/reading assignments. Although I will not quiz you on the readings, I hope you will come to class having read and considered the assigned materials for that day. This will make our time together much more productive and interesting. On days when we watch a film, we will end our class meeting by discussing it (as time permits).

Requirements

- Response papers. You will write at least five very short papers (double-spaced; 500 words maximum) responding to a question I pose about each of the films we will view together. (If you want, you can write six papers – one for each film; I will then disregard the lowest grade.) Each paper, due at the beginning of the following class, is worth 8 percent of your course grade; in the aggregate, then, they are worth 40 percent.
- Critical paper. You will write a longer paper of about 7-8 pages (double-spaced; 2,000 words maximum) that examines some aspect of the politics of Chinese cinema. On April 12, you must hand in a one or two sentence statement, spelling out the question you hope to explore. A week later, on April 19, you must hand in an outline showing how you will go about answering the question. (These two assignments will not be graded, but you will be penalized if you do not complete them on time.) The paper itself is due on our last class day, May 3. The paper is worth 45 percent of your course grade.
- Class participation. I will evaluate your participation highly if you: a) attend class regularly; b) watch and discuss the films at the scheduled time; and c) raise relevant questions/offer thoughtful comments. Class participation, as a whole, is worth 15 percent.

Required materials:

Four books are available at the Colby Bookstore:

- Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, editor, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (University of Hawaii Press, 1997) [**Lu**]
- Sheila Cornelius, *New Chinese Cinema: Challenging Representations* (Wallflower Press, 2002) [**Cornelius**]
- Jerome Silbergeld, *China into Film: Frames of Reference in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Reaktion Books, 1999) [**Silbergeld**]
- Esther C.M. Yau, ed., *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001) [**Yau**]

In addition, you will find required readings on reserve in the library, or on the web. (I also will distribute at least two readings.)

Hatch House Rules:

- Papers turned in late will be penalized, unless you can verify that you have experienced a family emergency or unexpected medical problem. Plan ahead and build a cushion into your time budget so that you aren't derailed by last-minute hitches (like a broken printer or a computer virus).
- You cannot pass this course without completing all required assignments, and without attending at least eight of our 12 classes.
- I will treat very seriously any and all cases of academic dishonesty (for example, committing plagiarism in writing a paper). Please let me know if you don't know what actions constitute plagiarism.
- Please turn off cell phones. If yours rings during class, I get to answer.

Course plan:

Week One: no class

Week Two (February 8)

Lecture & Discussion: “History and Politics of the Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong”

Reading:

- 1) James C.F. Wang, *Contemporary Chinese Politics* (Prentice Hall, 2002), pp. 1-68
- 2) Christopher Hughes, *Taiwan and Chinese Nationalism: National Identity and Status in International Society* (Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-45
- 3) Graham E. Johnson, “Degrees of Dependency, Degrees of Interdependency: Hong Kong’s Changing Links to the Mainland and the World,” in Lee Pui-tak, editor, *Hong Kong Reintegrating with China: Political, Cultural and Social Dimensions* (Hong Kong University Press, 2001), pp. 81-96
- 4) **Cornelius**, pp. 7-15

Week Three (February 15)

Lecture: “Visualizing China – Three Lenses and Our Own”

Reading:

- 1) Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, “Chinese Cinemas (1896-1996) and Transnational Film Studies,” in **Lu**, pp. 1-31
- 2) Yingjin Zhang, “Chinese Cinema and Transnational Cultural Politics,” in Zhang, *Screening China* (Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), pp. 15-41

Week Four (February 22)

Lecture & Discussion: “Mainland China’s Cinema – The Hard Politics of Censorship and the Soft Politics of Memory”

Reading:

- 1) **Cornelius**, pp. 16-52
- 2) Paul Pickowicz, “Velvet Prisons and the Political Economy of Chinese Filmmaking,” in Deborah Davis, et al, *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 193-230
- 3) Nick Browne, “Society and Subjectivity: On the Political Economy of Chinese Melodrama,” in Nick Browne, Paul Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack, and Esther Yau, editors, *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 40-56
- 4) Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, “Form and Content,” in Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), pp. 1-16

Week Five (March 1)

View and Discuss: Chen Kaige's "Yellow Earth" (1984; 90 minutes)

Reading:

- 1) **Cornelius**, pp. 53-67
- 2) Silbergeld, "Drowning on Dry Land: Yellow Earth and the Traditionalism of the Avante-garde," in **Silbergeld**, pp. 15-52
- 3) Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, "National Publicness," in Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), pp. 57-83
- 4) Esther C.M. Yau, "Yellow Earth: Western Analysis and a Non-Western Text," in Chris Berry, editor, *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (British Film Institute, 1991), pp. 62-79
- 5) Chen Kaige, "Breaking the Circle: The Cinema and Cultural Change in China," in *Cineaste*, Vol. 17 No. 3 (1990), pp. 28-31 [on-line via Colby library site]

Week Six (March 8)

View and Discuss: Zhang Yimou's "Red Sorghum" (1987; 92 minutes)

Reading:

- 1) Silbergeld, "Ruins of a Sorghum Field, Eclipse of a Nation: Red Sorghum on Page and Screen," in **Silbergeld**, pp. 53-95
- 2) Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, "National Cinema, Cultural Critique, Transnational Capital: The Films of Zhang Yimou," in **Lu**, pp. 105-136
- 3) Yuejin Wang, "Red Sorghum: Mixing Memory and Desire," in Chris Berry, *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (British Film Institute, 1991), pp. 80-103
- 4) Yvonne Ng, "Imagery and Sound in Red Sorghum," *Kinema*, spring 1995, at <http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/FINE/juhde/yvo951.htm>
- 5) Ben Moger-Williams and Wu Runmei. "The Art of Compromise," an interview in *Beijing This Month*, Vol. 63 (February 1999), available at <http://www.cbw.com/btm/issue63/16.html>

Week Seven (March 15)

Lecture & Discussion: "Taiwanese Cinema – Rejecting the Puppetmaster, Embracing the Hulk"

Reading:

- 1) Frederic Jameson, "Remapping Taipei," in Nick Browne, Paul Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack, and Esther Yau, editors, *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 117-150
- 2) Chia-chi Wu. "The Era of Post-New Taiwanese Cinema--Taiwanese Cinema in the 90s" available at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/EASC/eaol/news/archive/taiwan2.htm>
- 3) Abe Mark Nornes and Yeh Yue-yu, "Context Two: Taiwanese Cinema" (also see the other sites on "Taiwanese history," "The February 28th incident," and "The Controversy" (over the film, "City of Sadness"), at <http://cinemaspace.berkeley.edu/Papers/CityOfSadness/behind2.html>
- 4) Ji-Seok Kim, [A Flower in the Desert: 20 Years of Taiwan New Wave Cinema, A True Surviving Act](http://www.asianfilms.org/taiwan/) (hold control key and click on title; or go to) <http://www.asianfilms.org/taiwan/> (click on "general introduction," then "Taiwanese Cinema: 1982-2002")
- 5) Jane H.C. Yu, [From New Wave to Independent: Taiwan Cinema, 1982-2002](http://www.asianfilms.org/taiwan/) at <http://www.asianfilms.org/taiwan/>

Week Eight (spring vacation): no class

Week Nine (March 29)

View and Discuss Hou Hsiao-hsien's "Good Men, Good Women" (1995; 108 minutes)

Reading:

- 1) June Yip, "Constructing a Nation: Taiwanese History and the Films of Hou Hsiao-hsien," in ,," in **Lu**, pp. 139-168
- 2) Kwok-kan Tam and Wimal Dissanayake, "Hou Hsiao-hsien: Critical Encounters with Memory and History," in Tam and Dissanayake, *New Chinese Cinema* (Oxford Univeristy Press, 1998), pp. 46-59
- 3) David Walsh, "History and Sadness: Hou Hsiao-hsien's 'Good Men, Good Women,' in *Cinema Scope* (August 12, 2000); on the web at <http://wsws.org/articles/2000/aug2000/hou-a12.shtml>
- 4) Darren Hughes, "Good Men, Good Women," in *Long Pauses* (Oct. 21, 2002) at http://www.longpauses.com/good_men.htm
- 5) Robert Sklar, "Hidden History, Modern Hedonism: The films of Hou Hsiao-hsien," in *Cineaste*, Vol. 27 No. 4 (Fall 2002), p. 11 [on-line via Colby library site]

Week Ten (April 5)

View and Discuss Ang Lee's "Eat Drink Man Woman" (1994; 124 minutes)

Reading:

- 1) Wei Ming Dariotis and Eileen Fung, "Breaking the Soy Sauce Jar: Diaspora and Displacement in the Films of Ang Lee," in **Lu**, pp. 187-220
- 2) Sheng-mei Ma, "Ang Lee's domestic tragicomedy: immigrant nostalgia, exotic/ethnic tour, global market," in *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 30 No. 1 (Summer 1996), p.191-201 [on-line via Colby library]

Week Eleven (April 12)

Statement for paper is due

Lecture & Discussion: "Hong Kong Cinema – Jackie Chan and Globalized Space"

Reading:

- 1) Esther C.M. Yau, "Introduction: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World," in **Yau**, pp. 1-28
- 2) Law Kar, "An Overview of Hong Kong's New Wave Cinema," in **Yau**, pp. 31-52
- 3) Hector Rodriguez, "The Emergence of the Hong Kong New Wave," in **Yau**, pp. 53-69
- 4) Steve Fore, "Life Imitates Entertainment: Home and Dislocation in the Films of Jackie Chan," in **Yau**, pp. 115-141
- 5) Kwai-cheung Lo, "Transnationalization of the Local in Hong Kong Cinema of the 1990s," in **Yau**, pp. 261-276
- 6) Anne T. Ciecko, "Transnational Action: John Woo, Hong Kong, Hollywood," in **Lu**, pp. 221-237

Week Twelve (April 19)**Outline for paper is due**

View and Discuss Wong Kar-wai's "In the Mood for Love" (2000; 98 minutes)

Reading:

- 1) Stephen Teo, "Wong Kar-wai's 'In the Mood for Love': Like a Ritual in Transfigured Time" at <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/13/mood.html>
- 2) Marc Siegel, "The Intimate Spaces of Wong Kar-wai," in **Lau**, pp. 277-294
- 3) Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, "Trapped in the Present: Time in the Films of Wong Kar-wai," in *Film Criticism* (Winter 2000), v. 25 no. 2 [on-line via Colby library website]
- 4) David Bordwell, *Planet Hollywood: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 270-281
- 5) Ackbar Abbas, "Wong Kar-wai : Hong Kong Filmmaker," in *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (University of Minnesota, 1997), pp. 48-62
- 6) Jaime Wolf, "The Director's Director," *The New York Times*, September 26, 2004 [Hatch will distribute]

Week Thirteen (April 26)

View and Discuss Clara Law's "Autumn Moon" (1992; 102 minutes)

Reading:

- 1) Audrey Yue, "Migration-as-Transition: Pre-Post-1997 Hong Kong Culture in Clara Law's Autumn Moon," *Intersections*, 4, 1998; available at <http://www.sshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue4/yue.html>
- 2) Stephen Teo, "Autumn Moon" on webpage of *Senses of Cinema*, at <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/12/autumn.html>
- 3) Yingjin Zhang, "Tactics of Reinscription," in Zhang, *Screening China* (Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), pp. 266-271
- 4) Dian Li, "Narrating the Chinese Disapora," on webpage of *Senses of Cinema*, at <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/law.html>

Week Fourteen (May 3)**Paper is due**

Lecture & Discussion: "The Politics of Vision and Re-Vision in Greater China"

Reading:

- 1) **Cornelius**, pp. 90-114
- 2) Shujen Wang and Jonathan Jian-Hua Zhu, "Framing Piracy: China, Hollywood, and State Sovereignty in a Global Network Economy," unpublished paper, 2002 [Hatch distributes]
- 3) Sun Shaoyi, "Under the Shadow of Commercialization: The Changing Landscape of Chinese Cinema" at <http://www.asianfilms.org/china/landscape.html>
- 4) Rey Chow, "Film as Ethnography; or Translation Between Cultures," in Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Columbia University Press: 1995), pp. 173-202
- 5) Stephen Teo, "Local and Global Identity: Whither Hong Kong Cinema?" unpublished conference paper (April 19, 2000), available at <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/7/hongkong.html>