

The Evolution of Chinese Cinema and the Chinese Film Industry



Intensive course, Zhejiang University



General outline

The Chinese film market is by now the second largest film market after Hollywood and its figures are rapidly growing. However, from the 1950s until the mid-1990s the Chinese film industry was a state industry that was not generating much profit. Which were the main phases of transition from a state industry to one of the major players in the global business? Moreover, Chinese films – from the early screenings at the Shanghai teahouses to recent globally successful titles – have raised questions of national and cultural identity. How have films articulated the narrative of China across the 20th and 21st centuries? How have Chinese films circulated nationally and abroad?

Through the lens of a set of films, the course will examine Chinese film and the film industry at different moments in the development of Chinese cinema(s). Without following a strict historiography/chronological perspective, the different topics will be approached from a multidisciplinary perspective so as to include discussion of transnational Chinese cinema, early cosmopolitanism and contemporary global film circulation.

The course is planned as a one-week intensive course for Scandinavian MA students in China Studies, and counts as a total of 5 ECTS (135 hours). It will take place at a Chinese university campus and will be co-taught by one teacher from the Chinese university and one teacher from a Scandinavian university. The languages of instruction will be Chinese and English.

Prerequisites

It is assumed that students:

- Read and speak Modern Standard Chinese (Putonghua) at a level corresponding to the requirements for a BA degree in China Studies at a Scandinavian university
- Have comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture and society
- Have a basic interest and knowledge of cultural study research methods


Aims of the course


The main aims of the course are:

- that students achieve a basic understanding of the evolution of Chinese cinema and the Chinese film industry
- that students can problematise visual narratives/film modes/historical phases in Chinese film history in connection to social/political/economic dynamics
- that students can discuss media/films with appropriate terminology
- that students get a basic grasp of major film studies frameworks (i.e. film industry framework, aesthetic framework, socio-cultural framework)
- that students can relate films and visual culture to different aspects of Chinese culture and society

Course outline

Time	Theme/Title	Material
Day One		
Morning session	<p><i>Welcome and Presentation</i></p> <p>Introduction to Chinese cinema (1): from the perspective of the film industry</p> <p>A) Why does Chinese cinema matter (domestically and globally)?</p> <p>B) Which are the key moments in the evolution of the contemporary Chinese film industry?</p> <p>Discussion of the main stakeholders in the film business, examples of domestic blockbusters, co-production strategies and transnational films. Connected topics: international film festivals, Chinese and global stardom.</p>	<p>Focus on the Chinese film industry and global entertainment business (Singh 2011, De Valck 2007, Chua 2012).</p> <p>Excerpts from various films.</p>
	Lunch break	
Afternoon session	<p>Introduction to Chinese cinema (2): from the perspective of the film historiography</p> <p>A) Some possible periodisation in Chinese film history and issues related to this perspective of analysis.</p> <p><i>Group work/ Review of the topics</i></p> <p>How Chinese media (blogs, information portals, traditional media) promote Chinese films. Different approaches to marketing of the entertainment business will be discussed. Which are the most effective marketing tools in China and with online film services?</p> <p>Summary of the activity of the day: approaching cinema from the perspective of the film industry.</p>	<p>Focus on Chinese film history and various methodological approaches (Zhang).</p>
Day Two		
Morning session	<p>Students' discussion and presentation of the results of Tuesday's online search.</p> <p>Comparative analysis of the film industry in China and abroad.</p> <p><i>Early Shanghai cosmopolitanism and the film scene</i></p> <p>Chinese early cinema and its international connections, early stardom and cultural debates.</p>	<p>Search for early films online and Chinese-related academic articles. Fu Yongchun, Poshek Fu, 2003. 陆弘石, 2005.</p>
	Lunch break	

Afternoon session	<p>Screening Screening of an early Chinese film (title to be confirmed)</p>	
	<p>Work group: Discussion and elements of film analysis In a workshop form, students will be guided in how to discuss a film in terms of its cinematic elements and in relation to the social context. Summary of the activity of the day: approaching cinema from the perspective of film studies.</p>	
Day Three		
Morning session	<p>Discussion of the analysis of one early Chinese film (students' choice) - analysis - approach - references (how to use visual and textual references)</p> <p>Chinese cinema between art and market (1) Lines of development of the Chinese film scene after the 1990s: analysis of different examples of film "auteurs", commercial directors, film genres and Chinese block-busters.</p> <div data-bbox="343 987 512 1115" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block; margin-bottom: 5px;">  </div> <p>Bring to class a draft (2-3 pages) of a film analysis of an early Chinese film and related references (Chinese articles, online materials, visual references, etc).</p>	<p>Zhou Xuelin, 2007. Elena Pollacchi, 2008.</p>
Lunch break		
Afternoon session	<p>Workshop: develop the topics and methodology of term papers In groups, students will select two Chinese films that they think exemplify contrasting approaches to cinema (i.e. more oriented towards film art or more oriented to the market), and develop their own analysis and discussion of the selected works in terms of the film industry perspective and/or film studies perspectives.</p>	

Day Four		
Morning session	<p><i>Chinese cinema between art and market (1): expansion of film activities - Strategies of global visibility: the case of the Beijing International Film Festival</i> How China has imported the model of the global film event.</p> <p><i>Chinese cinema between art and market (2): expansion of film activities</i> The case of Chinese authors (Jia Zhangke, Diao Yanan, etc).</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <p>Students will further develop their term papers: - - Questions - Problems</p> </div>	Pickowicz & Zhang, 2006.
	Lunch break	
Afternoon session	<i>Film activity and/or guest visit (tbc) – this activity might change time/date according to the availability of guests during the week.</i>	
Day Five		
Morning session	<p><i>Discussion: The challenges of the Chinese film industry and its expansion</i> On the basis of the various approaches adopted during the course, this final lecture will look at the most recent debates/studies in relation to the Chinese film industry. Which are the challenges that the sector is facing in view of the changes related to the WTO agreement? How is the Chinese film (and entertainment) sector expanding through other visual supports (mobile phones, tablets, etc.)? What is the impact on traditional film production and how will it affect the Chinese audience vis-à-vis the international audience?</p> <p>- Examination requirements</p>	All articles and films on the reading list should be completed.
	Lunch break	
Afternoon session	<p><i>Student presentations of the drafts in view of the term papers.</i> The course will be concluded with a brief overview of the inter-related fields which have not been discussed in detail such as animation, documentary films, TV series, etc.</p> <p>Wrap up and evaluation of the course.</p>	

Learning activities

The course combines lectures, screenings and group discussions held in English and Chinese with a field trip. Students will be given assignments to prepare before each respective class session. Based on the course and the field trip, the students are required to present ideas for a final paper on the last day of the course and to hand in a final essay at a later date via email. Attendance is compulsory according to the regulations of the Chinese university and students are expected to come to classes well prepared. Students will receive the list of readings about one month before the course starts and are expected to have read at least the mandatory texts before the beginning of the course.

Course requirements/ examination

The students' performance during the course, including active class attendance, written assignments, and the final paper, count towards the final grade for the course. Exam papers must be 8-10 pages including references and notes (2300 characters with spaces per page). The paper has to include: a) an introduction presenting the topic and theoretical approaches; b) a brief section presenting the selection of films or written texts relevant for the topic; c) 2-3 sections presenting and discussing the data and the topic; d) a section titled "conclusion" with the 1-3 *main results* (conclusions) of the paper; e) a "list of references" that include at least 5 academic sources *that are used in the paper*. Only papers including *all of these points* will be able to pass, and papers will be graded passed/not passed.

Course Material

Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin, *Film Art: An introduction* (9th ed) (Mc GrawHill Education, 2010)

Cook, Pam (ed.) *The Cinema Book* (3rd ed.) (BFI, 2007)

Dix, Andrew, *Beginning Film Studies* (Manchester University Press, 2008).

Fu Yongchun, "From 'parrot' to 'butterfly': China's hybridization of Hollywood in distribution systems in the 1920s and 1930s", *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 8:1, 1-16.

Gibbs, John, *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation* (Wallflower Press, 2002)

Hill, John and Church Gibson, Pamela, (eds.) *Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford University Press, 1998)

陆弘石, 中国电影史于1905-1049年, 中国早期电影的叙述与记忆, 文艺术出版社, 2005年, 附录部分的影人访谈.

Monaco, James, *How to Read a Film* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Nelmes, Jill, (ed.) *An Introduction to Film Studies* (Routledge, 2007)

Perkins, V.F., *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (Da Capo Press, 1993)

Pickowicz, Paul and Yinjing Zhang, *From Underground to Independent*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, pp.1-41.

Pollacchi, Elena, 'The Sound of the City: Chinese Films of the 1990s and Urban Noise', in E. Wilson and A. Webber (eds), *Cities in Transition. The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*, London: Wallflower Press, 2008, pp. 193-204.

Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, pp.1-50. [Chinese text], 京大学出版社, 双城故事傅葆石, 25-96页。Link to download the Chinese text: <http://pan.baidu.com/s/1dDdPNO1>

Stam, Robert, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Blackwell, 2000)

White, Patricia and Corrigan, Timothy, *The Film Experience* (2Nd ed) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Zhang Yinjing, Xiao Zhiwei (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998. [Historical introduction, pp. 3-30]

Zhou Xuelin, *Young Rebels in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007, ch. 4 pp. 105-134.

Selected essays from the volume: Song Hwee Lim, Julian Ward (a cura di), *The Chinese Cinema Book*, London: BFI 2011;

PART 1 THEORIES

Introduction (pp. 1-5);

C. Berry, "Transnational Chinese Cinema Studies" (pp. 9-16);

Y. Zhang, "National Cinema as Translocal Practice: Reflections on Chinese Film Historiography" (pp. 17-25);

PART 2 TOPICS

W. Larson, "The Fifth Generation" (pp.113-121);

Jason McGrath, "Underground and Independent Films from the PRC" (pp.167-175);

Yomi Braester, "Contemporary Mainstream PRC Cinema" (pp.176-184);

Selected essays from the volume: Zhang Zhen (ed.) *The Urban Generation. Chinese Cinema at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007:

Zhang Zhen, "Bearing Witness. Chinese Urban Cinema in the Era of 'Transformation' (Zhuanxing)" (pp. 1-45);

Jason McGrath, "The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic" (pp. 81-114).