

HUMA 3250:

Independent Cinema in Contemporary China

Instructor: Daisy Yan DU
Associate Professor
Division of Humanities
Office: Room 2369, Academic Bldg
Office phone: (852) 2358-7792
E-mail: daisyyan@ust.hk
Office hours: by appointment only

Teaching Assistant: Muyang ZHUANG
E-mail: mzhuangac@connect.ust.hk
Office: Room 3001, Academic Bldg
Office hours: by appointment only

Time & Classroom:
Time: 12:00-2:50pm, Friday
Room: LTH & online

Course Description:

Since the June Fourth Movement in 1989, underground/independent cinema has emerged as an alternative film culture in China. Distanced from the state-controlled film industry and often regarded as a counterculture against mainstream ideologies, independent cinema is frequently banned in China and screened abroad at international film festivals. As a symbol of both media democracy and secrecy, it provides us with a unique window into understanding the diverse culture and society full of discordant voices in post-1989 China.

This course explores the histories, aesthetics, styles, narratives, techniques, and technologies of independent cinema in contemporary China. It will be student-oriented and conducted through the forms of seminars and discussions. It is a course of the students, by the students, for the students. Unlike traditional courses that are based on uni-directional lectures, readings, exams, and papers in a fixed classroom, this experimental course encourages students to venture outside and engage more with our society with a hands-on independent filmmaking project. It is a non-conventional, open, and democratic course that puts students in direct contact with our rapidly changing world.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this semester students should be able to:

- track the history and development of independent cinema in contemporary China
- be familiar with major independent filmmakers, their representative films, and the socio-historical context in which they emerged

- analyze particular independent films, identify their directors, technology/techniques, audio-visual styles, and socio-historical condition
- use a professional film vocabulary to discuss independent cinema
- sharpen critical thinking and enhance perceptive insights of our society
- produce an independent documentary with satisfactory degree of maturity and professionalism
- develop a strong sense of teamwork and social responsibility

Assignments:

- Watch all required films every week
- Prepare classroom discussions
- Final project for this course (choose one):
 - I. an academic research paper (around 10 pages, double spaced)
 - II. an independent documentary film (15-20 minutes)
 - * Home shooting
 - * One man's studio
 1. First version (incomplete version is fine): due before 10pm, May 15
 2. Final version: due before 10pm, May 29
 - 1). A micro-film (English, 15-20 minutes, high resolution)
 - 2). A poster of your film (English, high resolution)
 - 3). A trailer of your film (English, one minute)
 - 4). Around 5 minutes' post-credit scenes (English, the first minute should capture the director and his/her explanation of filmmaking ideas and philosophies, followed by others such as cut scenes).
For examples, please click: <http://daisyanduprojects.ust.hk/students-films>
- Long term project:
Students' short films will be edited into a feature-length documentary film, which will be submitted to international film festivals for official competition.

Grading Criteria:

- Attendance: 10% or F
- Participation: 30%
- Final project: 60%

Technical Issues:

- **Reading Materials:** Available at Modules, Canvas.
- **Audiovisual Materials:** Films for this course are available online at Modules, Canvas.
- **Discussions Forum:** Students can post any questions and comments for open discussion at "Discussions," Canvas. The instructor will check the forum on a regular basis to address your postings. Your postings will be counted towards classroom participation.
- **E-mail:** E-mail will be used frequently throughout the course. The instructor will use it to make announcements relevant to the course. You can also use it to ask questions

or express your concerns to your instructor. The instructor will reply your emails within 48 hours. Please check your university email account on a daily basis.

- **Contact:**

Canvas: cei@ust.hk

Hotline: 2358-6318

Library Reserve: lbreserv@ust.hk

Hotline: 2358-6776

Classroom Etiquette

- **Attendance** is mandatory. It is your responsibility to sign up and track your attendance. If you forget to sign up an attendance, the instructor will not make up for it. If you have to miss a class for a legitimate reason, please inform your instructor at least three days in advance and present relevant documents to the instructor within one week after the absence. Being 5 minutes late for class three times will count as one unexcused absence. One unexcused absence means 5 points off your final score. Four or more unexcused absences will automatically lower your final grade to F.
- **No Make-up Projects** are allowed. The instructor will grant a make-up project only for absolute necessities (e.g., medical reason, family crisis) and not because you have too much work and have run out of time. Please inform the instructor in advance if you believe you have a legitimate reason for a make-up project. You are expected to present supporting documents to the instructor.
- **No Late Submission** will be accepted. Please be on time.
- **Preparation:** You are expected to be well prepared before each class begins. Please watch the films of the week before you come to class. In this way, you can better make the most of class discussion.
- **Electronic Devices:** Please turn off your cell phones in class. Laptops and other electronic devices are allowed only for learning purposes.
- **Notification in Advance:** Always inform the instructor at least three days in advance for absence and other issues that need special attention and accommodation.
- **Religious Holiday Accommodation:** If you wish to claim accommodation for a religious holiday, you should talk to your instructor within the first two weeks of the semester. You need to provide supporting documents.
- **Learning Disability Accommodation:** If you wish to claim accommodation for any kind of learning disability, you should talk to your instructor within the first two weeks of the semester. Please provide supporting documents.
- **Academic Integrity:** Any academic dishonesty of any kind will be officially processed in accordance with the policies of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Week 1 (Feb 21): Introduction: The Secret Media Democracy after June Fourth

Film Screening in Class:

- *River Elegy* (Xia Jun, 1988)
- *Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers* (Wu Wenguang, 1990)

Required Reading:

- David Bordwell and Kristine Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction, Parts II Film Form and III Film Style*

Part I: The Subaltern

Week 2 (Feb 28): Pickpockets

Film Screening in Class:

- *Artisan Pickpocket* (aka *Xiao Wu*, Jia Zhangke, 1997)
- *Kamera* (2008)

Week 3 (March 6): Coal Miners

Film Screening in Class:

- *Blind Shaft* (Li Yang, 2002)
- *The Piano Tuner* (2010)

Week 4 (March 13): Involuntary Migrants

Film Screening in Class:

- *Bingai* (Feng Yan, 2008)
- *Red Paper Boat* (2008)

Week 5 (March 20): Migrant Workers

Film Screening in Class:

- *Piercing I* (animation, Liu Jian, 2010)
- *Big Hands* (animation, Ray Lei, 2013)

Week 6 (March 27): Gays

Film Screening in Class:

- *East Palace West Palace* (Zhang Yuan, 1996)
- *Bus 44* (2001)
- *How to Live Your Life Correctly* (Xindi Lou, 2018)

Part II: The Family

Week 7 (April 3): An Alternative Family

Film Screening in Class:

- *The Orphan of Anyang* (Wang Chao, 2015)
- *Son, It's Meal Time!* (2013)

Part III: The Environment

Week 8 (April 17): Feeding the People Smog?

Film Screening in Class:

- *Under the Dome-Investigating China's Smog* (Chai Jing, 2015)
- *Plastic China* (Wang Jiuliang, 2016)

Part IV: The State and History

Week 9 (May 8): The Secret of Statesmanship: Documenting the Party Secretary

Film Screening in Class:

- *The Transition Period* (Zhou Hao, 2009)
- *The Final Days* (2000)

Week 10 (May 15): Forbidden Memories of the Cultural Revolution

Film Screening in Class:

- *In Search of Lin Zhao's Soul* (Hu Jie, 2004)
- *2+2=5, Two Plus Two Equals Five* (2013)