

HUMA 3250:

Independent Cinema in Contemporary China

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Time & Classroom:

Time: 9:00-11:50am, Tuesday
Room: LTH & Zoom

Required Readings and Films:

- All available online at “Modules,” Canvas

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. 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 through 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. It is a course of the students, by the students, for the students.

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 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 film 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
 - Prepare a presentation
 - Final project for this course (choose one):
 - I. an academic research paper (around 8 pages, double spaced)
 - II. a video essay (1-10 minutes)
- samples: <http://daisyanduprojects.ust.hk/students-films>
<http://daisyanduprojects.ust.hk/students-films-2>

Grading Criteria:

- Attendance: 15% or F
- Participation: 20%
- Presentation: 20%
- Final project: 45%

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 to your emails within 48 hours. Email your TA for technical issues such as attendance, course materials, and Canvas. Please check your university email account daily.
- **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, your TA will not make up for it. If you have to miss a class for a legitimate reason, please inform your TA at least three days in advance and present relevant documents to him/her within one week after the absence. Being 5 minutes late for class three times will be counted 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 8): Introduction: The Secret Media Democracy

Film Screening in Class:

- *Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers* (Wu Wenguang, 1990)
- *You Said You Loved Me* (Eugene Chan, 2016)

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 15): Pickpockets

Film Screening in Class:

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

Week 3 (Feb 22): Coal Miners

Film Screening in Class:

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

Week 4 (March 1): Involuntary Migrants

Film Screening in Class:

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

Week 5 (March 8): Migrant Workers

Film Screening in Class:

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

Week 6 (March 15): Gays

Film Screening in Class:

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

Week 7 (March 22): The Nondescript

Film Screening in Class:

- *Dragonfly Eyes* (Xu Bing, 2017)
- *Sanyuanli* (Ou Ning and Cao Fei, 2003)

Week 8 (March 29): Midterm Break

Week 9 (April 5): No Class: Chingming Festival

Part II: The Family

Week 10 (April 12): An Underground Family

Film Screening in Class:

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

Week 11 (April 19): An Aboveground Family

Film Screening in Class:

- *Four Springs* (Lu Qingyi, 2017)

Part III: The Environment

Week 12 (April 26): 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 13 (May 3): The Secret of Statesmanship: Documenting the Party Secretary

Film Screening in Class:

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

Week 14 (May 10): Final Project Consultation