HUMA 1210: Chinese Women on Screen

Instructor:

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Time & Classroom:

Time: 12:00-2:50pm, Monday, Fall 2026
Room: LTK
Video-recordings by RVC will be provided after class

Required Readings:

- All available online at "Modules," Canvas

Course Description:

This undergraduate-level course surveys Chinese cinema through the lens of feminist film criticism, examining women as both historical figures and fictional characters to unravel the complex relationship between history and on-screen representation. Organized chronologically, the course traces cinematic images from "modern girls" and "new women" in Republican China to contemporary female immigrants in the age of globalization. Key shifts in women's visual representations are paired with major movements in film history, from 1930s left-wing cinema to post-1989 independent filmmaking. Students will learn methods of film analysis alongside core theories of gender and sexuality. All readings, lectures, discussions, assignments, and exams are conducted in English.

Course Objectives:

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

- summarize major cinematic movements in Chinese film history
- be familiar with the main ideas of feminist film theories
- track the changing images of women on and off screen (women as representations on film and women as real people in socio-historical context)

- explore the nuanced relationship between women on and off screen
- sharpen critical thinking and analyze women on screen informed by gender/sexuality theories
- analyze films with a professional film vocabulary
- enhance academic writing skills in film and gender/sexuality studies
- cultivate humanitarian values and develop a strong sense of social responsibility

Assignments:

- Watch all required films every week
- Read all required articles and/or book chapters every week
- Film review
- Final exam

Grade Breakdown:

- Attendance: 10% or F
- Participation: 10%
- Quiz: 10%
- A film review (300 words): 10%
- Final exam (closed book): 60%

Requirements for Papers (Not Applicable this Semester):

- Word file
- Use your name for the file name, capitalize your family name (MUI Ka Yee)
- Double spaced
- Chicago Citation Style (with footnotes and a bibliography)

Sample Papers:

- Look for various sample film analyses in *Film Art: An Introduction*, edited by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, available at HKUST library
- "Frustrated Communication in *Ex Machina*'s Opening Sequence," with comments, Purdue Online Writing Lab, link
- "The Killer Bean," link
- "Alternative Vision and Alternative History: On the Child Image in *11 Flowers*," by an undergraduate student of HKUST, available at Modules, Canvas
- "From Local to Translocal: Story of McDull Series," by a graduate student of HKUST, available at Modules, Canvas

Technical Issues:

- **Reading Materials:** All available online at "Modules," Canvas.
- **Audiovisual Materials:** All available online at "Modules," Canvas.
- **Discussions Forum:** Students can post questions and comments about the contents of this course for open discussion at "Discussions," Canvas. The instructor will check the forum on a regular basis to address your postings.

- **E-mail:** E-mail will be used frequently throughout this 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 TA and the instructor. For technical issues (eg. Canvas materials, film URLs, attendance, etc), please email your TA first. For course enrollment and lecture notes (eg. certain concepts or theories), email your instructor. **If not sure, always email your TA first**. The TA and the instructor will reply to your emails within 48 hours. Please check your campus email account daily.
- **Contact:**
  Canvas: cei@ust.hk Hotline: 2358-6318
  Library Reserve: lbreserv@ust.hk Hotline: 2358-6776
  Classroom Facility: Hotline: 2358-6815

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 need to miss a class for a legitimate reason, please inform your TA at least three days in advance and present relevant documents to your TA 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 total 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 your TA in advance if you believe you have a legitimate reason for a make-up project. You are expected to present convincing documents to your TA. The make-up project will be completely different and will be more difficult, and it will be graded more strictly.
- **No Late Submission** will be accepted. Please be on time.
- **Preparation:** You are expected to be well prepared before each class begins. Please read related course materials and watch the required films of the week before you come to class. In this way, you can make the most of classroom discussions.
- **Electronic Devices:** Please turn off your cell phones in class. Laptops, iPad, and other electronic devices are allowed only for taking notes in class. Please do not use them to check emails and browse irrelevant websites. If a student is found violating the rules, it means 5 points off his/her final score.
- **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 university.

Week 1 (Sept 7): Introduction: Chinese Women on and off Screen

Film Screening:

- *Chinese Women: The Great Step Forward—From Confucius to Mao* (Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2001) (54 minutes)

Readings:

- Tani Barlow, "Theorizing Woman: Funü, Guojia, Jiating (Chinese Women, Chinese State, Chinese Family), *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, 173-196.
- Zhang Zhen, "Introduction," *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema*, xiii-xxxiii.
- Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

References:

- David Bordwell and Kristine Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (10th edition), Part III Film Style 112-306 & Glossary 500-505
- "History of China," MCLC Resource Center, <http://www-chaos.umd.edu/history/toc.html>

Week 2 (Sept 14): Surveillance of Female Sexualities: Prostitutes and the Nation in Republican China

Film Screening:

- *The Goddess* (Wu Yonggang, 1934) Shanghai: Lianhua, 74 minutes
- *The Flowers of War* (Zhang Yimou, 2011). Recommended.

Readings:

- Rey Chow, "Visuality, Modernity, and Primitive Passions," *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, 4-26.
- Zhang Yingjing, "Prostitution and Urban Imagination: Negotiating the Public and the Private in Chinese Films of the 1930s," in *Cinema and Urban Culture*, 160-182.
- Carol Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Representations* no. 20 (Autumn 1987): 187-228.
- Film Synopsis of *The Goddess*:
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Goddess_%281934_film%29

Week 3 (Sept 21): Female Bodies and the Nation: Modern Girl and New Woman in Republican China

Film Screening:

- *New Women* (Cai Chusheng, 1934) Shanghai: Lianhua, 114 minutes
- *Center Stage* (Stanley Kwan, 1992). Recommended.

Readings:

- Sarah E. Stevens, "Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China," *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 3 (Autumn, 2003): 82-103.
- Kristine Harris, "The New Woman Incident: Cinema, Scandal, and Spectacle in 1935 Shanghai," *Transnational Chinese Cinemas* (University of Hawaii press, Honolulu, 1997), 277-302.
- Zhen Zhang, "Chapter 7: Fighting over the Modern Girl: Hard and Soft Films," in *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 244-297.
- Laikwan Pang, "The Left-wing Cinema Movement," *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement*, 1932-1937, 37-72.
- George Mosse, "Introduction," *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*.
- Film Synopsis of *New Women*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Women
- Nora in *A Doll's House* (Ibsen): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Doll%27s_House

Week 4 (Sept 28): Women, Wartime Nationalism, and Animation

Film Screening:

- *Princess Iron Fan* (Wan Brothers, 1941). Shanghai: Xinhua/Lianhe Studio, 73 minutes
- *Uproar in Heaven* (Wan Laiming and Tang Cheng, 1961-1964). Recommended.
- *Mulan* (Disney, 1998). Recommended.

Readings:

- Poshek Fu, "The Ambiguity of Entertainment: Chinese Cinema in Japanese-Occupied Shanghai, 1941-1945," *Cinema Journal* No. 1 (Autumn 1997): 66-84.
- Hung Chang-tai, "Female Symbols of Resistance in Chinese Wartime Spoken Drama," *Modern China* 15:2 (April 1989): 149-177.
- Daisy Yan Du, "Chapter One: A Wartime Romance: *Princess Iron Fan* and the Chinese Connection in Early Japanese Animation," in *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation*.
- Denize Kandiyoti, "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, 376-391.

References:

- *Journey to the West*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journey_to_the_West
- Film Synopsis of *Princess Iron Fan*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess_Iron_Fan_%281941_film%29
- Hua Mulan: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hua_Mulan

Week 5 (Oct 5): Beyond the Male Gaze: Female Voices from the Ruins of War

Film Screening:

- *Spring in a Small Town* (Fei Mu, 1948) Xi'an: Xi'an Studio, 91 minutes
- *Spring Cannot Be Locked* (Wang Weiyi, 1948). Recommended.
- *Dreaming to be Emperor* (puppet, Chen Bo'er, 1947). Recommended.
- *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013). Recommended.

Readings:

- David Wang, "Chapter Seven: A Spring that Brought Eternal Regret: Fei Mu, Mei Lanfang, and the Poetics of Screening China," in *The Lyrical in Epic Time*, 271-310.
- Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 33-50.
- Kaja Silverman, "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice," in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, 131–49. Los Angeles: University Publications of America, 1984.

Week 6 (Oct 12): Midterm Break
Week 7 (Oct 19): No Class: Chung Yeung Festival

Week 8 (Oct 26): Racializing the Female Bodies: Ethnic Girls and Socialist Comedy

Film Screening:

- *Five Golden Flowers* (Wang Jiayi, 1959) Changchun: Changchun Film Studio, 90 minutes
- *From Mao Towards Full Equality* (Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2001) (55 minutes)

Readings:

- Ling Zhang, "Navigating Gender, Ethnicity and Space: *Five Golden Flowers* as a Socialist Road Movie," in *The Global Road Movie*, 150-171.
- Paul Clark, "Ethnic Minorities in Chinese Films: Cinema and the Exotic," *East-West Film Journal* 1.2 (1987): 15-32.
- Lola Young, "Chapter 1: Themes and Issues," in *Fear of the Dark: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema*, 5-27.

Week 9 (Nov 2): Women and Machines: Tractor Girls and Socialist Modernity

Film Screening:

- *Spark of Life* (Dong Fang, 1962) Xi'an: Xi'an Studio, 91 minutes

Readings:

- Daisy Yan Du, "Socialist Modernity in the Wasteland: Changing Representations of the Female Tractor Driver in China, 1949-1964," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* (Spring 2017): 55-94.
- Tina Mai Chen, "Female Icons, Feminist Iconography? Socialist Rhetoric and Women's Agency in 1950s China," *Gender & History* 15 (2), 2003: 268-95.
- Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), 149-181.
- Film Synopsis of *Spark of Life* in PDF format

Week 10 (Nov 9): Gender Erasure and Desexualization during the Cultural Revolution

Film Screening:

- *Red Detachment of Women* (Fu Jie and Pan Wenzhan, 1971). Beijing: Beijing Studio, 100 minutes
- *Red Detachment of Women* (Xie Jin, 1961). Recommended.

Readings:

- Kristine Harris, "Re-makes/Re-models: The Red Detachment of Women between Stage and Screen," *Opera Quarterly* 26 (2010): 316-342.
- Paul Clark, "Introduction: A Revolution in Culture," *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, 1-9.
- Yue Meng, "Female Images and National Myth," in *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*, edited by Tani Barlow, 118-136.
- Jeffrey A. Brown, "Gender and the Action Heroine: Hardbodies and the Point of No Return," *Cinema Journal*, 35. 3 (1996): 52-71.
- Cultural Revolution: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Revolution
- Film Synopsis of *Red Detachment of Women* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Detachment_of_Women_%28ballet%29

Week 11 (Nov 16): Women Directors and Female/Feminist Perspective

Film Screening:

- *Woman, Demon, Human* (Huang Shuqin, 1987) Shanghai: Shanghai Studio, 102 minutes
- *The Story of Liubao Village* (Wang Ping, 1957). Recommended.

Readings:

- Haiyan Lee, "*Woman, Demon, Human:* The Spectral Journey Home," *Chinese Films in Focus II*, edited by Chris Berry. 2nd edition, 243-249.
- Dai Jinhua, "Invisible Women: Contemporary Chinese Cinema and Women's Film," *Positions* 3:1 (Spring 1995): 255-280.

- Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," in *Notes on Women's Cinema*, London: Society for Education in Film and Television, 1973, 24-31.
- Film Synopsis of *Woman, Demon, Human* in PDF format

Week 12 (Nov 23): Gender, Forced Migration, and Independent Filmmaking

Film Screening:

- *Bingai* (Feng Yan, 2007) 117 minutes
- *Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers* (Wu Wenguang, 1990). Recommended.

Readings:

- Paul Pickowicz, "Social and Political Dynamics of Underground Filmmaking in China," *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*, 1-21.
- Daisy Yan Du, "Documenting Three Gorges Migrants: Gendered Voices of Dis/placement and Citizenship in Rediscovering the Yangtze River and Bingai," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 38.1&2 (Spring/Summer 2010): 27-47.
- Rosi Braidotti, "The Exile, the Nomad, and the Migrant: Reflections on International Feminism," *Women's Studies International Forum* 15 (1992): 7–10.
- Three Gorges Dam: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Gorges_Dam

Film Review: Queering Independent Cinema: Lesbians on Screen (due on Nov 30, Canvas Submission)

- *Fish and Elephant* (Li Yu, 2001)

Week 13 (Nov 30): The Exotic/Erotic Journeys: Female Migrant Workers

Film Screening:

- *Ermo* (Zhou Xiaowen, 1994) Shanghai: Shanghai Studio, 95 minutes

Readings:

- Judith Farquhar, "Technologies of Everyday Life: The Economy of Impotence in Reform China," *Cultural Anthropology* 14:2 (May 1999): 155-179.
- Janet Wolff, "On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism," *Cultural Studies* 7.2 (1993): 224–39.
- Silvia Pedraza, "Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender," *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991): 303-325.
- Film Synopsis: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ermo

Week 14 (Dec 7): Self-Study: Displacements: Gender, Diaspora, and Transnational Feminism

Film Screening:

- *Farewell China* (Clara Law, 1990) Hong Kong: Youhe Film, 111 minutes

Readings:

- Gina Marchetti, "Gender and Generation in Clara Law's Migration Trilogy: *Farewell China*, *Autumn Moon*, and *Floating Life*," *From Tiananmen to Times Square: Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens: 1989-1997*.
- Susan Stanford Friedman, "Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 23.2 (Fall, 2004): 189-212.