

Twentieth-Century China in Documentary Films

Fall 2026
Monday 12:00–14:50
Room 4619, Lifts 32

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OFFICE: 2350
OFFICE HOURS: Wednesday 17:00-18:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the turbulent history of twentieth-century China through texts and documentary films. In addition to reading scholarly books, articles, and historical documents, we will closely study several films made by journalists and filmmakers of the time and in recent years. Major topics include the 1911 Revolution, China's role in World War II, the Communist Revolution, the Korean War, the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and Reform and Opening-Up. Some films are in English and some are in Chinese with English subtitles.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):

- Understand major historical events and general trends in 20th-century China
- Think historically and critically about history and films
- Understand history as personalized and lived experiences
- Produce a short documentary film using primary and secondary sources

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

- Pomfret, John. *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2016.
- Chang, *The Hijacked War: The Story of Chinese POWs in the Korean War*. Stanford University Press, 2020.
- Li, Jie. *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era*. Duke University Press, 2020.
[muse.jhu.edu/book/78745]

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Before each session, you are expected to have completed all of the readings assigned for the session and watched the films if they are available online (most are). Attendance is required, as the lectures and films include materials not covered in the textbook or readings.

Please be forewarned: This course is a history class, NOT a film enjoyment class. It requires a substantial amount of reading and other assignments. If you are not committed to consistently performing the following tasks on a weekly basis, don't take this class.

ASSESSMENTS

1	Attendance and Participation	5%
2	Timeline, biographies, book, document and film notes x 10 (weekly)	20%
3	Film/book reviews x 2	30%
4a	Research paper outline & timeline	10%
4b	Final research paper	25%
5	Short film based on final research paper	10%

1. **Attendance and Participation.** If you can't attend all lectures and tutorials, don't take the course.
2. **Ten weekly assignments: timelines/chronologies, short biographies of historical figures, and reading/document/film notes.** Before each class, you should have completed all the readings assigned for the week and watched the film. You should hand in a timeline with at least **TEN events** and short **biographies of THREE individuals** covered in the film (other than Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong). You can draw from the readings, films, Wikipedia, and other sources. The timeline can help bring some order to the complex sequence of events we will be studying. By the end of the semester, you should have combined all timelines into one file.
3. **Two book/film reviews.** Choose two of the books/films listed in the syllabus and write a short review essay of 800-1000 words. Your review should summarize the main message of the book/film, discuss the background and process of its writing or production, analyze its use of historical sources, and offer your critical analysis.
 - Use page numbers (of books and articles) or timestamps (of films) to make specific references, for example:
 - John Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2016), pp. 1-10.
 - Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country*, p. 5.
 - Ge Peiqi, a former Nationalist general turned professor, was severely criticized by students in a struggle session during the Anti-Rightists Campaign (*The Mao Years*, 00:24:45)
4. **Final research paper.**
 - (1) You first identify an issue, a puzzle, a theme, an interesting person, or an event in history that has been poorly understood, misunderstood, or understudied.
 - (2) You ask a question, explain why it is important or interesting, and develop a thesis or make an argument.
 - (3) You will search for primary and secondary sources that will support your thesis/argument.
 - **Primary sources** are records left by people (or groups/organizations) who participated in or witnessed the events you are studying or who provided a contemporary expression of the ideas or values of the period under examination. Examples of primary sources include letters, autobiographies, diaries, government documents, minutes of meetings, newspapers, or books written about your topic at that time. Non-written sources include interviews, films, photos, recordings of music, clothing, buildings, or tools from the period.
 - **Oral history interview as a primary source.**
 - You may conduct oral history interviews on one topic of your choice. You are responsible for locating the interviewee and conducting the interview.
 - Audio or video-record the interview with the interviewee's consent, as you may need the video recording for film production (Assignment #5).
 - The final oral history interview report should situate your interviewee's story into a larger historical context, and you should explain how it sheds light on the history of twentieth-century China or the broader world.
 - **Secondary Sources** are accounts written by people who were not themselves involved in the events or in the original expression of the ideas under study. Written after the events, they are based upon primary sources and/or other secondary works.
 - (4) You will use both primary and secondary sources to analyze how our (or your) understanding of this historical person, issue, theme, event, and period evolved.
 - (5) Demonstrate how your thesis or new understanding helps you better understand the issue at hand.
 - (6) Draw a conclusion.
5. **A short documentary film based on your research paper.**
 You will work individually or in teams (with a maximum three members) to produce a 5-8-minute film, based on a team member's research paper and/or oral history interviews. You are required to use the following components to create the film:
 - Oral history interview footage and/or historical documentary film footage downloaded from the Internet.
 - Historical photographs, letters, writings, and other primary sources obtained from the Internet and your interviewee.

- Original archival documents.
- Historical maps and/or Google Map/Earth.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: A WARNING ON PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the act of using of someone else's words, ideas, or research results without proper attribution, and passing them off as your own. The most common forms of plagiarism include the following¹:

- (1) Verbatim copying of words, sentences, paragraphs or entire sections or chapter without quotation and proper attribution. This is the most obvious form of plagiarism. You must use quotation marks even if you only borrow several words in sequence from a source. If you cite a specific term that encapsulates an author's original idea, you must use quotation marks even if you only cite one word.
- (2) Paraphrasing (i.e. changing some of the wording) of a passage without acknowledging the source. Even if you change all of the words but retain the author's basic idea, you must cite the original source.
- (3) Properly citing a source in an earlier note and then continuing to use the source without citing. You must **cite the source every time** you adopt an idea or a specific wording. This may mean a footnote at the end of every sentence, or if the other author's ideas are uninterrupted by yours for a whole paragraph (generally not a good idea for a paper), you may have a footnote at the end of the paragraph.
- (4) Citing a primary source as if you have looked at it yourself, when you simply **found the primary source quoted or cited in a secondary work**. If you have not seen the primary source yourself or if you found the source only because you saw it referenced elsewhere, you also must cite the secondary work in which it was originally cited. Example: Julius Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, p. 12, **cited in** Gerbil Munchkin, *Caesar's Life and Times*, p. 2345. (轉引|白)
- (5) Common knowledge: You do not need to cite information that is part of common knowledge, i.e. information that an educated person can be reasonably expected to know before engaging in research. If you are in doubt about what qualifies as common knowledge, consult your instructor.

You must use **quotation marks** even if you only borrow **several words in sequence** from a source. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and is covered by university policy on academic dishonesty. If I suspect that you have used another person's (including another book, article, or website's) words without proper footnoting, we will notify you and require that you submit an electronic copy of your paper to turnitin.com, so that we can use available electronic means to check for plagiarism. Just as the Web makes plagiarism easier, it also makes the detection of plagiarism easy. Students found guilty of plagiarism will at the least get a failing grade on the paper, and at worst fail the course and be taken to the University for disciplinary action. Consider this fair warning. **DO NOT PLAGIARIZE**. It's just not worth it. **The consequences can be extremely serious**. Refer to the university web site: <http://www.ust.hk/provost/integrity/student-4.htmlLinks> for definitions and university procedures in dealing with plagiarism.

GUIDELINES ON GENERATIVE AI TOOLS:

While AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, and Perplexity can be valuable resources for research and writing support, they are not substitutes for your own critical thinking, research, and writing. When utilizing AI tools:

- Use them to improve grammar, enhance writing clarity, and aid in research.
- Do not use AI tools to generate entire pieces of writing, including papers, essays, or reports.
- Always clearly acknowledge content generated by AI tools in your work.

LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (9/7) Introduction

¹ UC San Diego Department of History, "Academic Integrity Policy," accessed 2 Feb 2023, <https://history.ucsd.edu/undergrad/resources.html#Academic-Integrity-Policy-and-I>.

WEEK 2 (9/14) The End of the Dynasty and the 1911 Revolution

Readings:

- Li Jie, *Utopian Ruins*, Ch. 5 (Foreign Lenses)(150–191)
- Pomfret, Ch. 13 Song Dynasty (190–203); 15 Opportunity or Threat (204–221)

Films:

- Theodore H. White, *China: The Roots of Madness* (1967) (77 min)
- *China: A Century of Revolution*. Part I “China in Revolution 1911–1949” (1989) (114 min)

WEEK 3 (9/21) The Rise of Chinese Nationalism and Communism

Readings: Pomfret, 16 A Red Star (222–233); 18 Bloody Saturday (245–260)

Films:

- Joris Ivens with Robert Capa, *The 400 Million* (1939) (54 min)
- *China: A Century of Revolution*. Part I “China in Revolution 1911–1949” (1989) (114 min)

WEEK 4 (9/28) The War of Resistance (1937–45), China as America’s Ally in WWII (1942–45)

Readings: Pomfret, *Burmese Days* (280–291); 21 *Dangerous Liaisons* (292–305)

Film: Frank Capra, *Why We Fight: The Battle of China* (US Office of War Information, 1944) (65m)

WEEK 5 (10/5) The Civil War (1945–1949) and the Early PRC

Readings:

- Chang, *The Hijacked War: The Story of Chinese POWs in the Korean War* (2020), Ch. 1.
- *Spence, Chapters 18–19 (Fall of KMT; birth of the PRC).

Films:

- *China: A Century of Revolution*. Part I “China in Revolution 1911–1949” (1989) (114 min)
- *China: A Century of Revolution*. Part II “The Mao Years 1949–1976” (1994) (115 min)
- *Mao in Color* (Discovery, 2015) (44 min)

WEEK 6 (10/12) The Korean War

Readings:

- Chang, *The Hijacked War*, Introduction (pp. 1–18), Ch. 9 (pp. 209–240).

Film:

- VOA 解密时刻: 志愿军战俘 1-5 集 <https://www.voachinese.com/a/2998979.html>

Book/Film Review #1 Due on 10/15

WEEK 7 (10/19) NO CLASS

WEEK 8 (10/26) The Anti-Rightist Campaign

Readings:

- Li Jie, *Utopian Ruins*, Ch. 1 (Blood Testaments)(25–67).
- Philip P. Pan, “Searching for Lin Zhao’s Soul” and “Blood and love,” in *Out of Mao’s Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of a New China* (2008), pp. 21–79.
- *La Frances Hui, China Through an Independent Lens: Six Experts Recommend Their Favorite Chinese Documentary Films [<http://www.chinafile.com/china-through-independent-lens>]

Films:

- Hu Jie 胡杰, *Searching for Lin Zhao’s Soul* 尋找林昭的靈魂 (2004) (115 min)
- *China: A Century of Revolution*. Part II “The Mao Years 1949–1976” (1994) (115 min)

WEEK 9 (11/2) The Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine

Reading:

- Frank Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Most Devastating Catastrophe*,

1958–1962 (NY: Walker & Co, 2010), i–xxiii, 324–337.

Film: Patrick Cabouat, *Mao's Great Famine* (2012) (52 min)

- <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/mao-s-great-famine?context=channel:world-history-in-video>

WEEK 10 (11/9) The Cultural Revolution I

Film:

- Geremie R. Barme, Carma Hinton, and Richard Gordon, *Morning Sun* (Long Bow Group, 2003) (117 min)
[Morning Sun | Kanopy](#)

WEEK 11 (11/16) The Cultural Revolution II

Readings:

- Li Jie, *Utopian Ruins*, Ch. 1 (Blood Testaments)
- Christ Buckley, "Bowed and Remorseful, Former Red Guard Recalls Teacher's Death," *New York Times*, Jan. 14, 2014.
- Xiao Han, "Confessions of the Cultural Revolution," trans. Stacy Mosher, *New York Times*, Jan. 27, 2014.
- Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel, "Alternative archive: China's independent documentary culture," in *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement*, pp. 135–154.
- *Wu Wenguang, "DV: Individual filmmaking," in *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement*, pp. 49–54.

Film: Hu Jie 胡杰, *Though I am Gone* 我雖死去 (2007) (68 min)

WEEK 12 (11/23)

1980s, Reform and Opening Up

Readings:

- Pomfret, Ch. 34 (Out of Bad Things) (442-451); 35(Not because we love them) (452-461)

Film:

- *Assignment China: The Week That Changed the World* (58 min)
- *Isaac Stern, *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China* (1981) (84 min)

Documents:

- Mao-Nixon talk transcripts (1972) <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118064>
- Shanghai Communiqué (1972)

WEEK 13 (11/30) 1980s

Films:

- Carma Hinton, *Tiananmen: The Gate of Heavenly Peace* (1995) (180 min)
- *China: A Century of Revolution*. Part III "Born Under the Red Flag 1976–1997" (1997) (112 min)

12/5 Film Review #2 Due

12/12 Final paper outline + timeline

TBD, Final Film Presentation (in place of a final exam)

12/22, Final Paper + timeline due

12/24, Short Film due