

CRN 15815
Thursdays, 6- 9:20 p.m. (111 Lillis)

Fridays 12-12:50 p.m. (132 Lillis)

Professor Goodman
Office Hours: Wed-12:30-1:30,
Friday-after class
office: 353 McKenzie Hall

HIST 399: Modern China in Film

General Description

This course uses visual material, primarily motion pictures, to introduce themes and issues in modern Chinese history. Film can provide a point of emotional engagement with the dramatic shifts and transformations of modern China because film concretizes historical events at the level of daily life and experience. This class highlights the visual connection provided by film to acquaint students with major events and themes in modern Chinese history.

Photographs, documentary footage, and feature films (from both earlier periods and from the present) are also forms of historical documents that invite critical interpretation. An equally important goal of the class, beyond providing an acquaintance with modern Chinese history, is the development of critical visual literacy. The political swings, wars, and violence of Chinese history have produced a rich visual archive of propaganda films that will be discussed in the context of public debates over visual evidence and the visual representation of history. Students are encouraged and expected to think critically about the historical context, significance, circulation, and political uses of film and photographic evidence. By juxtaposing photographs, documentary film and Chinese feature films of the 1930s to the present, the class asks students to evaluate visual documents carefully.

Although the course emphasizes the viewing and discussion of visual materials, it is not text free. To understand the historical contexts of Chinese films and the events they depict, it is necessary to read some Chinese history, some film history, and some film criticism. All of the assigned readings listed in the syllabus must be completed for the class meeting for which they are assigned, or it will not be possible to “read” the films critically.

The history of film spans and punctuates twentieth-century Chinese history. Chinese film has been, from its inception, deeply concerned with the project of building a modern Chinese nation. This is one of the central themes of the course. A second interpretive focus involves understanding the political uses of Chinese film and film evidence in both domestic and international arenas. Throughout the term, you are encouraged to consider these themes as you think about films and modern Chinese history.

Required Texts:

Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese*

History). 2nd edition (Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005). This is an excellent, readable introduction to modern Chinese history that you will need to rely upon, in addition to class lectures, to understand the historical contexts for the films you see.

Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (Routledge, 2004).

Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge, 2008).

**Required course packet. This is available for purchase at the UO bookstore. If you don't see it on the shelf for the class you need to ask bookstore staff to make you another copy, which they can do in 24 hours.

Also on reserve, for your reference:

Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).

*Sue Williams, *China: A Century of Revolution* (Ambrica productions in association with WGBH Boston and Channel Television UK). 2001, 1997. Documentary introduction to modern China.

*Chris Berry, *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1991).

*Chris Berry. *Chinese Films in Focus* (London: British Film Institute, 2003).

*Yomi Braester, *Witness Against History: Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford, 2003).

*Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Cinematic Left-wing Cinema Movement 1932-1937* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

*Zhang Yingjin, ed. *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*. (Stanford, 1999).

Some, but not all of the films shown in association with the class are available for your reference at the Knight Library reserve desk. All Chinese films are presented with English subtitles or English translation.

Course Requirements:

Assigned readings, film screenings, website exercises, lectures and discussions are all required, without exception. In addition, all students must take notes on films, which will be needed for written exercises that generally will be completed during our Friday sessions. Five short written exercises will together count for 50% of your grade. Discussion participation counts 30% of your grade. The final exam will count 20% of your grade.

Basic Rules: Absences or late assignments will only be excused in the event of documented illness. All work that you turn in must be your own. Any work submitted for credit that includes the words or ideas of anyone else must fully and accurately identify your source in a complete citation. If you are confused about this or do not understand the consequences of academic dishonesty at the UO—or the ethical issues behind these university policies—please read the UO plagiarism policy: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>.

Film viewing exercises:

Five written viewing exercises are required for the class. You may bring your reading and film-viewing notes to class on Fridays to facilitate this writing. The film reaction papers are designed to help you to critically view and interpret the visual materials you encounter in this class. If you observe the following steps, your written exercises will be successful:

- Keep up-to-date in course readings, and make notes on class lectures. You will need to refer to these to be sure you have a grip on the relevant context for films.
- In most cases you will need to think about both the historical events depicted in the films AND the political and historical context relevant to the time when the film was produced. You will receive question sheets to help you think about how each film presents an *interpretation* of Chinese history (Where is the emphasis? What is the message? What is the perspective?)
- Read carefully the film synopses provided in class and note the time/political context of production. Think about how the context affects both the way the film conveys its message (think examples) and the content of the message.
- Make notes on films as you watch so that you can recall details when you need them.