

EALC 5335
CULTURAL CHINAS: 20TH CENTURY CHINESE LITERATURE AND FILM
Spring 2025

Dr. Ori Tavor

oritavor@sas.upenn.edu

Office: 710 Williams Hall
Office Hours: M 9:00-10:00
Class Meeting: R 5:15-7:15

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course serves as a thematic introduction to the cultural history of modern China through the lens of literary and cinematic works produced in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and other transnational Chinese communities in the 20th century. Together, we will examine major issues and discourses in China's century of modernization: enlightenment and revolution, politics and aesthetics, sentimental education and nationalism, historical trauma and violence, gender and sexuality, social hygiene and body politics, diaspora and displacement, youth sub-culture and urban imagination. The class will follow a chronological trajectory, beginning with the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the rise of colonial presence in Mainland China. From there, we will discuss the construction of the modern nation-state in 1911, the ensuing period of Japanese occupation and civil war, the formation of the PRC, the tumultuous Mao years, culminating in the Cultural Revolution, and the ensuing Reform and Opening Up decades. We will conclude the semester by looking at the legacy of the long 20th century on contemporary Chinese societies. The class will feature both asynchronous and synchronous components. Students are responsible for reading the weekly short story and watching the film at home in advance. The in-class meeting will be completely discussion-based. No knowledge of Chinese is presumed, and all readings will be available in English on the Canvas website in PDF form.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Class Attendance and Participation: 40%

Response Papers: 60% (10% each)

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Class attendance is part of the learning process. Students will be permitted to miss up to **two** sessions without their grade being adversely affected. If you miss an assignment due to a legitimate absence (such as serious illnesses, religious holidays, or University-sanctioned events), please notify me in advance of the class you will be missing. In addition, class attendance means participation. This is a discussion-based class, so you must come prepared to discuss the assigned film and short story in class.

RESPONSE PAPERS

Each student will be responsible for writing a response to **Six** films and short stories (out of a total of twelve). Half of the students will be in group 1 and half in group 2. Groups will be assigned in class, at the end of our first meeting. All prompts will be readily available on Canvas in advance. Each essay will be ~1500 words. The dates are clearly marked below and there will be **no extensions**.

Group 1	Group 2
1/30 <i>Fearless</i>	2/6 <i>Raise the Red Lantern</i>
2/13 <i>Yellow Earth</i>	2/20 <i>Love in a Fallen City</i>
2/27 <i>The Blue Kite</i>	3/6 <i>Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress</i>
3/20 <i>Beijing Bicycle</i>	3/27 <i>Eat Drink Man Woman</i>
4/3 <i>The Joy Luck Club</i>	4/10 <i>Shower</i>
4/17 <i>Dumplings</i>	4/24 <i>A Touch of Sin</i>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week One (1/16), *Course Introduction*

Week Two (1/23), *The Dying Breaths of an Empire: Embarking on the “Century of Humiliation”*

Lu Xun, “A Madman’s Diary,” in: *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 8-16.

Week Three (1/30), *The Quest for a New China at the Turn of the Century*

Cai Yuanpei, “New Year’s Dream,” in: *Hundred Days’ Literature*, 199-212.

[*Fearless*](#) 霍元甲 (dir. Ronny Yu 于仁泰, 2006)

Week Four (2/6), *Old Habits Die Hard: The Perseverance of Tradition in Republican China*

Shen Congwen, “Xiaoxiao,” in: *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 82-94.

[Raise the Red Lantern](#) 大红灯笼高高挂 (dir. Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 1991)

Week Five (2/13), *Country Roads: The Transformation of Rural Society in the Mainland*

Mao Dun, “Spring Silkworms,” in: *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 56-73.

[Yellow Earth](#) 黄土地 (dir. Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, 1984)

Week Six (2/20), *Love and Loss in Japanese-Occupied Hong Kong*

Zhang Ailing, “Sealed Off,” in: *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 174-183.

[Love in A Fallen City](#) 傾城之戀 (dir. Ann Hui On-wah 許鞍華, 1984)

Week Seven (2/27), *A Great Leap Forward: Revolutionary Politics under Mao*

Mo Yan, “Iron Child,” in: *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 379-385.

[The Blue Kite](#) 蓝风筝 (dir. Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壯壯, 1993)

Week Eight (3/6), *Down to the Countryside: Sent Down Youth in the Cultural Revolution*

Yan Geling, “Celestial Bath,” in: *White Snake and Other Stories*, 65-85.

[Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress](#) 巴尔扎克与小裁缝 (dir. Dai Sijie 戴思杰, 2002)

Week Nine (3/13), NO CLASS (Spring Break)

Week Ten (3/20), *New Hopes, New Opportunities: Social Changes in the Post-Mao Era*

Gao Xingjian, “The Accident,” in: *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 329-336.

[Beijing Bicycle](#) 十七岁的单车 (dir. Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅, 2001)

Week Eleven (3/27), *Across the Straits: Tradition and Cosmopolitanism in 1990s Taiwan*

Zhu Tianwen, “Fin-de-Siècle Splendor,” in: *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 388-402.

[Eat Drink Man Woman](#) 飲食男女 (dir. Ang Lee 李安, 1994)

Week Twelve (4/3), *Model Minorities: Tradition and Modernity in Diasporic Communities*

Amy Tan, "Two Kinds," *The Atlantic* (February 1989)

[*The Joy Luck Club*](#) 喜福會 (dir. Wayne Wong 王穎, 1993)

Week Thirteen (4/10), *Holding on to the Past: Resistance and Nostalgia in the Reform Era*

Peter Hessler, "Hutong Karma," *The New Yorker* (February 2006)

[*Shower*](#) 洗澡 (dir. Zhang Yang 张杨, 1999)

Week Fourteen (4/17), *Cannibalism, Capitalism, and Body Horror in Post-Colonial Hong Kong*

Feng Chi-Shun, "Expensive Tissue Paper," in: *Hong Kong Noir*, 169-183.

[*Dumplings*](#) 餃子 (dir. Fruit Chan 陳果, 2004)

Week Fifteen (4/24), *Broken Dreams: Alienation and Dislocation at the Turn of the 21st Century*

Han Song, "Submarines," in: *Broken Stars*, 115-123.

[*A Touch of Sin*](#) (天注定, dir. Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯, 2013)