Chinese Indie Films across the Century and Metamorphic Micro Cinema
School of Journalism, Fudan University

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Class time:
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Course Description

This course will systematically introduce contemporary Chinese independent filmmaking from around the start of the 1990s, its 10-year “underground” status since then, and another 10 years of market-struggling status quo in China. The final bloc of the course will be focused on the emerging Chinese Micro Cinema mainly distributed through online, which is the transforming and evolving morph in the digitization era of its passing predecessor—Chinese Indie Films. In class, through analyzing and discussing clips of important representative works by Chinese independent filmmakers in different periods of time, students will have a chance to delve into these renown films and more importantly take a close look at the cultural, economic, and political transformations in Chinese society over the last two decades (1990s and 2000s). Also, by reviewing the currently popularizing representative works of Chinese Micro Cinema and comparing it with a prostrating predecessor, alongside the required textbook and articles, this course will shed some light on Chinese popular culture and ethos evolvement over the past 20 years. This will enable students a profound insight into the trajectory of this evolvement in the context of over 30 years of Chinese economic reform and nearly a decade of rapid development. Also, students will divide into groups and each group of 4-5 members will making a 15 minute digital micro cinema (short film) as the final term project.

Course Evaluation

Class participation is required for every student. All the students must finish the required readings and film viewings for each week before class and bring questions from the specific readings and films to class. Student contribution to class discussions is completely encouraged and considered for their final grades. Alongside class presence (10%) and discussion participation (15%), grading will be mainly based on mid-term personal papers (30%) and final group-produced micro cinema projects (45%).

Assignments

The mid-term personal paper requires about 2000 words, analyzing a chosen Chinese indie filmmaker, his/her representative works and manifested aesthetics, comparisons between different filmmakers’ artistic styles, or a cinematic phenomenon reflecting China’s cultural and social changes over the decades, etc. For the group-produced term project, detailed requirements of this final assignment will be handed out in the early stage of the semester.

Readings

- Required textbook: Zhang Zhen (ed.), The Urban Generation: Chinese
Lecture & Readings Outline

Bloc 1 (two sections): Sixth Generation Filmmakers and the beginning of Chinese Independent filmmaking.

Week 1 (February 29, 2012)

Topic: The Sixth Generation’s debut and the first Chinese indie film work, Mom (Dir. Zhang Yuan, 80min, 1990). Social, economic and political context and aesthetic influences on the Sixth Generation’s creative choices.

Screen: Beijing Bastards (Dir. Zhang Yuan, 88min, 1992), clips of Wang Xiaoshuai’s The Days (80 min, 1993) and Frozen (95 min, shot in 1994 and released in 1997)

Readings:

Week 2 (March 6, 2012)

Topic: Chinese Indie filmmaking gains momentum while more Sixth Generation filmmakers emerge. Why are they called the Sixth Generation? What are the common characteristics of these filmmakers’ works and the differences between their films and Fifth Generation Directors’ works?

Screen: In the Heat of the Sun (Dir. Jiang Wen, 134 min, 1994), clips of Weekend Lover (Dir. Lou Ye, 96min, 1995), A Beautiful New World (Dir. Shi Runjiu, 97min, 1998); Spicy Love Soup (109min, 1997) or Shower (92min, 1999), both dir. by Zhang Yang.

Readings:

Bloc 2 (two sections): Chinese indie filmmakers turn underground while government regulations strengthen.

Week 3 (March 13, 2012):

Topic: The social and political context in late 1990s China, how the Sixth Generation Directors keep making films, and their underground status.


Readings:

**Week 4 (March 20, 2012)**

**Topic:** Popular culture and ethos in late 1990s China and Chinese Underground Indies get acclaimed at European film festivals.

**Screen:** Suzhou River (Dir. Lou Ye, 83min, 2000). Clips of Lou Ye’s film: Purple Butterfly (2003).

**Readings:**


**Bloc 3 (two sections): New challenge for Chinese cinema in the new century: an industry vs. independents.**

**Week 5 (March 27, 2012)**

**Topic:** Loosened-up censorship means harder survival for Chinese Indie filmmakers: Chinese social and economic transformation during the first decade of the 21st century.

**Screen:** Jia Zhangke’s Venice Film Festival awarded film, Still Life (108min, 2006), clips of Ning Hao’s Mongolian Ping Pong (102min, 2004).

**Readings:**


**Week 6 (April 11, 2012):**

**Topic:** Female Indie filmmakers in China.

**Screen:** A Letter from an Unknown Woman (Dir. Xu Jinglei, 90 min, 2004), won Best Director Award from San Sebastián International Film Festival, clips of Ning Ying’s On the Beat (105min, 1995), Perpetual Motion (90 min, 2005).

**Readings:**


**Bloc 4 (two sections): Chinese Indie films’ metamorphic form in the Digitization Era: Micro Cinema**

**Week 7 (April 18, 2012):**

**Topic:** Nostalgia amidst the Consumerizing Show Culture and Online Popular Culture.

**Screen:** Chopsticks Brothers’ Old Boy (43 min, 2010) and Father (28 min, 2011)

**Readings:**


**Week 8 (April 25, 2012):**
**Topic:** Diversity and Deviant of online trans-media narratives in the Digitization Era.

**Screen:** Nono Jin’s *Let You Know Shanghai in Ten Minutes* (10 min, 2011) and Jiao Yang’s *The Gao Chao Redemption* (10 min, 2011).

**Readings:**


**Bloc 5 (5 sections): Learn how to applying digital media tools for narrative experiment.**

**Week 9 (May 9, 2012): PERSONAL MID-TERM PAPER DUE.**

**Content:** Learn how to use digital cameras and editing equipments in Apple computer lab.

**Reading:** to be decided.

**Week 10: Out-of-town field trip.**


**Content:** Students divide into groups, 4 or 5 members form one crew, employing Sony EX-3s or Panasonics DV cameras and Apple Final Cut Pro nonlinear editing equipments provided by Fudan J-school, shoot and edit a 15 minute-long digital micro cinema.

**Bloc 6 (2 Sections): Rough cut screening and class wrap-up.**

**Week 15 (June 20, 2012): MICRO CINEMA’S ROUGH CUT DUE AND CLASS SCREENING.**

**Topic:** Each crew’s rough cut version of micro cinema will be screening in class and each crew will get comments and feedback from fellow students and course instructor; then crews will revise their works based on above suggestions.

**Week 16 (June 27, 2012): FINAL VERSION DUE & HAND IN ON DVD.**