

KIIS Taiwan Program, Summer 2026

FILM 399 / ARC 401 Topics: Contemporary Asian Films

Instructor: Prof. Qian Gao

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Instructor's office hours: on site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change



1. Course Description:

This course is an introduction to sinophone cinemas that will include representations from Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China, with a focus on how social, political and cultural changes find their expressions in films. Students will learn basic skills for interpreting cinematic language, gain an overall view of the development of film in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, and develop a critical understanding of the history and cultures of Chinese societies through film. Taught in English, with no prerequisite.

2. Overall KIIS Program Student Learning Outcomes:

KIIS Study Abroad Mission Statement:

KIIS provides high-quality education abroad programs for students from all diverse backgrounds that promote deep international learning, are integrated into the curriculum, and encourage critical and creative thinking. Our goal is to help students understand the wider world and develop personal and professional skills for lifelong enrichment. We strive to go beyond generalizations and cultural stereotypes to help foster a nuanced appreciation of the world in which we live.

Students participating on KIIS study abroad programs aim to:

- 1) Understand contemporary issues of their host country/countries (i.e. KIIS program location).
- 2) Develop skills to interact comfortably in a global setting.
- 3) Understand other cultures.

Prior to your KIIS study abroad program, and again at the conclusion of your program, KIIS will ask each student to a) answer a few multiple-choice questions, and b) write a short reflective essay (two paragraphs in length) related to the elements detailed above. There is no right or wrong answer, and your responses will not affect your grade in any way. The purpose of the exercise is to help KIIS measure the effectiveness of its study abroad programs.

3. Course Objectives and Specific Learning Outcomes:

This course is an introduction to Chinese cinemas in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, with an emphasis on the ways in which they represent or negotiate China, Chinese identity, cultural heritage, and Chinese modernity. This course aims to help students see beyond what is pleasing to the eye or entertaining: the sociopolitical circumstances under which Chinese films are made, their subtle ambiguities as well as overt messages, and their interpretations of history, the relationship between individual filmmakers' aesthetic styles and social concerns, among other things.

4. Major Topics covered in the Course:

Selected films are grouped under topics while roughly following a chronological order. The topics include: the “golden days” of Chinese leftist cinema in the 1930s and 1940s (the first and second generation directors and their works); the imperative to create “socialist realist” art in China under Mao’s leadership (1949-1976) (films of the third-generation directors and most early works of fourth-generation directors); the challenge to official ideology posed by the fifth-generation directors after the end of the Cultural Revolution; the sixth-generation directors’ attempts to capture the changing faces and new mysteries of China with a globalizing economy; contemporary Hong Kong and Taiwan films about urban life and cultural hybridity; and the representations of China’s cultural past and the new global image culture in martial arts fantasies.

5. Fulfillment of General Education Requirement:

This course fulfills GE Non-Western Cultural Tradition requirement.

6. Required Readings:

FILMS

Once Upon a Time in China III (Huang Feihong). Directed by Tsui Hark, China/Hong Kong, 1993. 徐克, 《黄飞鸿》

Two Actresses (Wutai jiemei). Directed by Xie Jin. China, 1965. [谢晋, 《舞台姐妹》]

The Blue Kite (Lan Fengzheng). Directed by Tian Zhuangzhuang. China/Hong Kong/Japan, 1993. 田壮壮, 《蓝风筝》

To Live (Huo zhe). Directed by Zhang Yimou. China/Hong Kong, 1994. 张艺谋, 《活着》

Raise the Red Lantern (Dahong denglong gaogao gua). Directed by Zhang Yimou, China, 1991. [张艺谋, 《大红灯笼高高挂》]

Pickpocket (Xiao Wu). Directed by Jia Zhangke. China/Hong Kong, 1997. 贾樟柯, 《小武》

A Touch of Sin (Tian zhu ding). Directed by Jia Zhangke. China/Japan, 2013. 贾樟柯, 《天注定》

A World without Thieves (Tianxia wuzei). Directed by Feng Xiaogang. China/Hong Kong, 2004. [冯小刚, 《天下无贼》]

Eat Drink Man Woman (Yinshi nannu). Directed by Ang Lee, Taiwan, 1994. 李安, 《饮食男女》。
Comrades, Almost a Love Story (*Tian mi mi*). Directed by Peter Chan. Hong Kong, 1996. [陈可心, 《甜蜜蜜》]
Kongfu Hustle (*Gongfu*). Directed by Stephen Chow. Hong Kong, 2004. [周星驰, 《功夫》]
Old Boys (*Lao nanhai*). Directed by Xiao Yang. China, 2010. [肖央, 《老男孩》]

TEXTS

1. Cornelius, Sheila, with Ian Haydn Smith. *New Chinese Cinema: Challenging Representations*. London: Wallflower, 2002. [Hereafter **NCC**]
2. Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, New York: Routledge, 2004. (recommended) [Hereafter **CNC**] (E-Book version may be available at your school's library.)
3. Berry, Chris, ed., *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*. London: British Film Institute, 2003. [Hereafter **Focus**] (Recommended)
4. All other reading materials are posted on the course's Canvas site.

7. Graded Assignments:

Attendance: 10%
Class participation: 15%
Presentations: 25% (individually graded)
Paper plan small group conference: 10% (individually graded)
Paper outline presentation: 10%
Final paper: 30%

Work will be graded on this scale:

90 – 100 A
80 – 89 B
70 – 79 C
60 – 69 D
Below 60 E (F)

This course will be graded on this basis, without regard to other scales (i.e., plus-and-minus) which may apply at your college or university. Note KIIS/WKU does not award +/- grades, only full letter grades.)

8. Generative AI Policy:

Generative AI is permitted/encouraged in some ways, with proper attribution, but prohibited in other ways.

Students are allowed, encouraged, and even required to use Generative AI in some ways but are prohibited from using it in other ways. Keep in mind that any content produced by generative AI can “hallucinate” (produce false information), so students are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of any AI-generated content. Examples of citing AI are available at: <https://libguides.wku.edu/stylewrite/ai>.

Students are permitted and encouraged to use generative AI in the following ways:

- **Brainstorming:** You may use generative AI to stimulate creativity, generate ideas, or brainstorm topics for papers, presentations, and discussions. The generated content must serve as a steppingstone, not a final product.

- Citation Assistance: AI tools can be used to manage, format, and organize citations and references, promoting adherence to academic writing standards and specific style guides required for individual assignments.
- Grammar and Style Checking: AI-powered writing enhancement tools may be used to help with spelling, grammar, syntax, and stylistic errors.
- Concept Understanding: Generative AI can be used to explain or simulate concepts taught in class, aiding in a deeper understanding.
- Research Assistance: AI can be used to conduct initial research, compile data, and summarize articles, books, or papers. It should not replace traditional research methods but rather enhance them.

You may not use generative AI in coursework in the following ways:

- Plagiarism: Using AI-generated content as your original work without attribution. This includes essays, papers, presentations, and exam answers.
- Data Manipulation: Using AI tools to alter data or create misleading information.
- Misrepresentation of Skills: Using generative AI to complete tasks that are meant to assess your knowledge and skills.
- Confidentiality Breach: Using AI tools that might violate KIIS/university policies or laws related to data privacy and confidentiality.

Metacognitive Reflection. In addition to a proper citation, the student should include the following statement with any assignment where generative AI is used for assistance.

"I used generative AI [INSERT NAME OF PLATFORM] for assistance in the following ways on this assignment: [INSERT WAYS USED, such as brainstorming, citation assistance, grammar and style checking, concept understanding, and research assistance, etc.]."

9. Attendance Policy:

KIIS program participants are expected to be punctual to and in attendance at all classes, presentations, meetings and required excursions, and to remain with the program for the full academic period. Unexcused absences from classes and/or mandatory meetings will result in a lowering of the student's final grade, as will excessive tardiness. Multiple unexcused absences could result in expulsion from the program. Any absence from an academic class session must be excused for medical reasons.

10. Disability Accommodation:

KIIS will make every reasonable effort to provide accommodations for program participants with special needs or disabilities, but we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Be aware that many foreign countries do not have comprehensive legislation comparable to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As a result, businesses and other establishments operating in foreign countries may not be able to provide accommodations.

If you have a disability accommodation need, we recommend you contact your KIIS Campus Representative, <https://www.kiis.org/about-kiis/contact-us/campus-representatives/> early in your program selection process so that s/he has time to discuss any specific needs, including which KIIS programs may be best suited. You also are welcome to contact KIIS Assistant Director, Maria Canning, maria.canning@wku.edu, to discuss your disability accommodation needs (e.g. housing, transportation, excursions, class schedule, etc.).

Immediately after acceptance, notify KIIS Admissions and Enrollment Specialist, Haley McTaggart, haley.mctaggart@wku.edu, if you have a special need or disability that might require any form of accommodation abroad. Failure to notify KIIS may prevent you from participating on your KIIS program.

If you require any accommodations abroad, you must provide KIIS Admissions and Enrollment Specialist, Haley McTaggart, an accommodation letter from your home campus' disability accommodation office that lists the accommodations you are eligible to receive. Please do not request accommodations directly from your KIIS Program Director or other KIIS Faculty; the KIIS Office will notify your KIIS Program Director and/or Faculty after we have received your above accommodation letter.

In some cases, you may need to make arrangements for a caregiver to join you on your KIIS program, should your physician, campus disability accommodation office, or KIIS make such a recommendation or require it.

11. Title IX / Discrimination & Harassment:

Recent attention to gender discrimination and sexual harassment at colleges and universities reminds us of the importance of adhering to standards of ethical and professional behavior. KIIS Study Abroad is committed to supporting and encouraging safe and equitable educational environments for our students, faculty, and program directors. Students, faculty, and program directors are required to be civil and treat each other with dignity and respect. As such, harassment and/or discrimination of any kind will not be permitted or tolerated.

Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, and sexual/dating/domestic violence) and sex discrimination are violations of KIIS policies. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to a) KIIS Assistant Director, Maria Canning (+1-859-200-1000) or KIIS Executive Director, John Dizgun (+1-270-227-2288), b) WKU's Title IX Coordinator, Ena Demir (270-745-6867 / ena.demir@wku.edu) or WKU's Title IX Investigator, Michael Crowe (270-745-5429 / michael.crowe@wku.edu). Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a KIIS program director and/or faculty member, KIIS program directors and faculty are considered "Responsible Employees" of Western Kentucky University and MUST report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator.

If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center, <https://www.wku.edu/heretohelp/> at 270-745-3159.

For more information on KIIS Title IX, see <https://www.kiis.org/students/health-safety/title-ix-clery/>; additional Title IX resources can be found here <https://www.wku.edu/titleix/titleixbrochure2020.pdf>.

Everyone should be able to participate on a KIIS program, attend a KIIS event, or work in a KIIS environment (e.g. KIIS office) without fear of sexual harassment or discrimination of any kind. Be respectful of each other.