

**UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA**  
**Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures**  
**Fall Semester 2020**

Time: M 3:30-5 pm

Zoom: <https://hawaii.zoom.us/j/99162884432>; Passcode: 923793

Office hours: TR 4-5 pm & by appointment

Zoom: <https://hawaii.zoom.us/j/804305159>; Passcode: 900513

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**EALL 647 Contemporary Chinese Documentary: Record, Expression, Cultural Space**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Independent documentary filmmakers have been producing some of the most exciting works of contemporary Chinese cinema since the 1990s. Even though censorship and the lack of commercial distribution conspire to keep them from gaining the audience and recognition they deserve, independent documentaries have not only captured the complexity of Chinese experience, but have also broken stylistic ground and helped shape the aesthetics of contemporary Chinese cinema in general.

In this course, we will study a selection of contemporary independent documentary works on a wide range of subjects (e.g. rural election, political petitioners, religious communities, sex work, minority and the environment, etc.) Each work will be examined in two sets of context, one pertaining to the social, political context, the other questions particular to the documentary form. We will engage theoretical debates on key issues such as the authenticity, form, and ethics of the documentary, while also look at their implications in the Chinese context. Finally, we will look at ways in which independent documentary participates in the negotiation for public space in contemporary China.

This course has three interrelated goals: 1) achieve a more critical understanding of contemporary Chinese society through documentary films; 2) understand documentary as a visual language and a mode of thinking with the camera. 3) understand independent documentary as a cultural discourse.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of the course, students will

1. be familiar with the history of Chinese independent documentary
2. deepen their understanding of contemporary Chinese society and culture
3. develop skills to think critically about the social issues involved
4. be familiar with the theoretical debates and issues in documentary studies
5. be able to situate Chinese independent documentary in a global context
6. learn to write effectively about documentary

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Zhang, Zhen and Angela Zito (eds.). *DV-Made China: Digital Subjects and Social Transformations after Independent Film*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii Press, 2015. (DV)

Additional materials in Chinese online and provided by the instructor.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berry, Chris, Xinyu Lü, and Lisa Rofel. *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2010. (NCD)

Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1967. (AB)

De Villiers, Nicholas. *Sexography: Sex Work in Documentary*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2017. (SG)

Gaines, Jane, and Michael Renov. *Collecting Visible Evidence*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1999. (VE)

Hung, Ho-fung. *Protest with Chinese Characteristics: Demonstration, Riots, and Petition in the Mid-Qing Dynasty*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. (PCC)

Juhasz, Alexandra and Alisa Lebow (eds.). *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*. London: Blackwell, 2015. (CD)

Kahana, Jonathan (ed.). *The Documentary Film Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016. (DR)

Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010. (BN)

Nornes, Abé Mark. *Forest of Pressure: Ogawa Shinsuke and Postwar Japanese Documentary*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2007. (OS)

Pickowicz, Paul, and Yingjin Zhang. *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. (UTI)

Renov, Michael. *The Subject of Documentary*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2004. (MR)  
----- (ed.). *Theorizing Documentary*. New York, London: Routledge, 1993. (TD)

Robinson, Luke. *Independent Chinese Documentary: From the Studio to the Street*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. (LR)

Waldman Diane and Janet Walker, *Feminism and Documentary*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1999. (FD)

Winston, Brian. *Claiming the Real: Documentary: Grierson and Beyond*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. (BW)  
----- (ed.). *The Documentary Film Book*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. (DB)

Zhang, Zhen. *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of Twenty-first Century*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. (UG)

Zhang, Zhen and Angela Zito (eds.). *DV-Made China: Digital Subjects and Social Transformations after Independent Film*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii Press, 2015. (DV)

## SCHEDULE

### Week 1 (8/24)

*Introduction: independent cinema as a cultural space*

**Screen: Rachel Tejada, *Digital Underground in the People's Republic***

- Dan Gao, "Chinese Independent Cinema in the Age of 'Digital Distribution'" (DV)
- Markus Nornes, "Filmless Festivals and Dragon Seals: Independent Cinema in China"

Optional:

- Seio Nakajima, "Watching Documentary: Critical Public Discourse and Contemporary Urban Chinese Film Clubs" (NCD)

→ **Screen: Wu Wenguang, *Bumming in Beijing* (吴文光 流浪北京) (1990, 69 m)**

### Week 2 (8/31)

*Origin and context*

Wu Wenguang, *Bumming in Beijing* (吴文光 流浪北京) (1990, 69 m)

- Chris Berry, "Getting Real: Chinese Documentary, Chinese Postsocialism" (UG)
- Lü Xinyu, "Rethinking China's New Documentary Movement: Engagement with the Social" (NCD)

Optional:

- Wu Wenguang, "DV: Individual Filmmaking" (NCD)

→ **Screen: Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Charlotte Zwerin, *Salesman* (1968, 91 m)**  
You can find it on [YouTube](#) or [Amazon](#) (better quality); watch this [interview](#).

**No class on 9/7.**

### Week 3 (9/14)

*Observational documentary I: Wiseman & direct cinema*

Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Charlotte Zwerin, *Salesman* (1968, 91 m)

clips:

Hu Min, *The Vociferous Malu* (胡民 喧嚣的马路) (2006, 90 m)

- Brian Winston, "Introduction: The Documentary Film" (DB)
- Bill Nichols, "The Question of Evidence, the Power of Rhetoric and Documentary Film" (DB)

- Frederick Wiseman with Alan Westin, “You Start off with a Bromide” (DR)
- Benito Vila, “Fredrick Wiseman: The Director Who Makes the Ordinary Extraordinary” (watch clips on original website)
- Watch: [interview](#) with Maysles brothers on *Salesman*

Optional:

- Watch: [Wiseman Interview \(ZFF Masters\)](#)

→ **Screen: Ogawa Shinsuke, [Sanrizuka Heta Village](#) (1973, 146 m)**

**Week 4 (9/21)**

*Observational documentary II: the Ogawa mode*

Ogawa Shinsuke, [Sanrizuka Heta Village](#) (1973, 146 m)

- Watch: Markus Nornes [presents Ogawa Shinsuke's Sanrizuka Heta Village](#)
- Abé Mark Nornes, “Eastwards” (DB)

Optional:

- Abé Mark Nornes, “The Sanrizuka Series” (eBook)

→ **Screen: Cong Feng, *Dr. Ma's Country Clinic* (丛峰 马大夫的诊所) (2007, 215 m)**

**Week 5-6 (9/28, 10/5)**

*Documentary as evidence, as counter-narrative and alternative archive*

→ **First response paper due on 9/28**

Cong Feng, *Dr. Ma's Country Clinic* (丛峰 马大夫的诊所) (2007, 215 m)

- Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel, "Alternative Archive: China's Independent Documentary Culture" (NCD)
- Paul Arthur, “Jargons of Authenticity (Three American Moments)” (TD)
- Philip Rosen, “Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts” (TD)

Optional:

- Andre Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (AB)

→ **Screen: Gu Tao, *The Last Moose of Aoluguya* (顾桃 犴达罕) (2013, 100 m)**

**Week 7 (10/12)**

*The ethics and politics of ethnography; poetics and objectivity*

Gu Tao, *The Last Moose of Aoluguya* (顾桃 犴达罕) (2013, 100 m)

- Trinh T. Minh-ha, “The Totalizing Quest of Meaning” (TD)
- Michael Renov, “Toward a Poetics of Documentary” (TD)
- Brian Winston, “The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription” (TD)

- **Screen: Yang Mingming, *Female Directors* (杨明明, 女导演) (2012, 42 m) + Liu Jiayin, *Oxhide II* (刘伽茵 牛皮) (2009 132 m)**

**Week 8 (10/19)**

*First person documentary; performance*

Yang Mingming, *Female Directors* (杨明明, 女导演) (2012, 42 m)

Liu Jiayin, *Oxhide II* (刘伽茵 牛皮) (2009 132 m)

Clips: Xie Lina, *Mom* (谢莉娜 妈妈) (2009 85 m)

- Luke Robinson, "From 'Public' to 'Private': Chinese Documentary and the Logic of *Xianchang*" (NCD)
- Bérénice Reynaud, "Chinese Digital Shadows: Hybrid Forms, Bodily Archives, and Transnational Vision" (DV)
- Alisa Lebow, "First Person Political" (DB)

- **Screen: Qiu Jiongjiong, *Madame* (邱炯炯 姑奶奶) (2010, 120 m)**

**Week 9 (10/26)**

*Queerness; performance*

- **Second response paper due on 10/26**

Qiu Jiongjiong, *Madame* (邱炯炯 姑奶奶) (2010, 120 m)

- Nicholas de Villiers, "Gray Mornings of Tolerance: Cui Zi'en's *Night Scene* and *Queer China, 'Comrade' China*" (SG)
- Thomas Waugh, "Acting to Perform Oneself": Notes on Performance in Documentary" (DR)
- Stella Bruzzi, "The Performing Film-Maker and the Acting Subject" (DB)

- **screen: Xu Tong, *Wheat Harvest* (徐童 麦收) (2008, 99 m)**

**Week 10 (11/2)**

*Sex work; the ethics of documentary; narrative*

Xu Tong, *Wheat Harvest* (徐童 麦收) (2008, 99 m)

- Nicholas de Villiers, "How Much Does It Cost for Cinema to Tell the Truth of Sex?" (SG)
- Pratap Rughani, "'The Dance of Documentary Ethics'" (DB)
- Linda Williams, "The Ethics of Intervention: Dennis O'Rourke's *The Good Woman of Bangkok*" (VE)
- Brian Winston, "Life as Narrativised" (DB)

- **Screen: Wang Bing, *Til Death Do Us Part* (王兵 疯爱) (2013, 228 m)**

**Week 11 (11/9)**

*The ethics of documentary; cruelty debate*

Wang Bing, *'Til Death Do Us Part* (王兵 疯爱) (2013, 228 m)

Clips: Wang Bing, *Tiexi Qu: West of the Tracks* (王兵 铁西区) (2002)

- Brian Winston, "The Tradition of the Victim in Griersonian Documentary" (DR)
- Abé Mark Nornes, "Marking the Body: The Axiographics of the Visible Hidden Camera" (DV)
- J. P. Sniadecki, "The Cruelty of the Social: *Xianchang*, Intersubjectivity, and Interobjectivity" (DV)

→ **Screen: Ji Dan, *When the Bough Breaks* (季丹 危巢) (2011, 144 m)**

**Week 13-14** (11/16, 11/23)

*Education; migrants; family relation; the documentary relationship*

Ji Dan, *When the Bough Breaks* (季丹 危巢) (2011, 144 m)

- Vivian Sobchack, "Inscribing Ethical Space: 10 Propositions on Death, Representation, and Documentary" (DR)
- Yiman Wang, "'I Am One of 'Them' and 'They Are My Actors': Performing, Witnessing, and DV Image-Making in Plebeian China" (NCD)

→ **Screen: Ma Li, *Born in Beijing* (马莉 京生) (2011, 240 m)**

**Week 15-16** (11/30, 12/7)

*Social justice; the family; documentary as political advocacy; the filmmaker and the subject*

→ **Third response paper due on 12/7**

Ma Li, *Born in Beijing* (马莉 京生) (2011, 240 m)

Clips: Zhao Liang, *Petition* (赵亮 上访) (2009)

- Jane M. Gaines, "Political Mimesis" (VE)
- Zhang Zhen, "Toward a Digital Political Mimesis: Aesthetic of Affect and Activist Video" (DV)
- Jie Li, "Filming Power and the Powerless: Zhao Liang's *Crime and Punishment* (2007) and *Petition* (2009)" (DV)

Optional:

- Ho-fung Hung, "Resistance and Petitions, 1820-1839" and "Epilogue: The Past in the Present" (PCC)

## **SCREENING SCHEDULE (tentative)**

8/24	Rachel Tejada, <i>Digital Underground in the People's Republic</i>
8/28	Wu Wenguang, <i>Bumming in Beijing</i> (吴文光 流浪北京) (1990, 69 m)
9/4	Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Charlotte Zwerin, <i>Salesman</i> (1968, 91 m)
9/18	Ogawa Shinsuke, <a href="#">Sanrizuka Heta Village</a> (1973, 146 m)

9/25	Cong Feng, <i>Dr. Ma's Clinic</i> 丛峰 马大夫的诊所 (2007, 215 m)
10/9	Gu Tao, <i>The Last Moose of Aoluguya</i> (顾桃 犴达罕) (2013, 100 m)
10/16	Yang Mingming, <i>Female Directors</i> (杨明明, 女导演) (2012, 42 m)
10/23	Liu Jiayin, <i>Oxhide II</i> (刘伽茵 牛皮) (2009 132 m)
10/30	Qiu Jiongjiong (邱炯炯 姑奶奶) (2010, 120 m)
11/6	Xu Tong, <i>Wheat Harvest</i> (徐童 麦收) (2008, 99 m)
11/13	Wang Bing, <i>'Til Death Do Us Part</i> (王兵 疯爱) (2013, 228 m)
11/20	Ji Dan, <i>When the Bough Breaks</i> (季丹 危巢) (2011, 144 m)
11/27?	Ma Li, <i>Born in Beijing</i> (马莉 京生) (2011, 240 m)

### **EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

Students will be evaluated on the basis of their overall performance, which includes class participation, presentations, and written assignments.

#### **GRADING:**

Attendance: 5%

Participation: 10%

3 short (3-5 pages) response papers: 30%

Presentation (20-minute conference style presentation): 25%

Final paper (research paper on a topic of the student's choice developed in consultation with the instructor): 30%