

CUS 325E Seminar in Current Cultural Issues

THE 馳星周 PHENOMENON

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In this course, we will work very hard to take him *seriously*. Stephen Chow Sing Chi's widely popular "no-sense" (無厘頭) jokes from the 1990s have been assumed to be incomprehensible to all but local HK people because they "contain substantial local elements difficult to translate readily to a non-local viewer without deep and thorough cultural de-coding and re-coding" and his films have been known to "defy global imagination because their local sensibility is deeply rooted in popular history and imagination, drawing from a whole range of contemporary sociolinguistic accents and the sociocultural repertoire of daily life experience" (Stephen Chan 2005). Chow's comic personas have been assumed as embodying the voice of the powerless and the lowly, striving for success promised by the Hong Kong money dream, and expressing a continual will to fight post-1997. Through investigating the implications and significance of Stephen Chow as a cultural icon and his linguistic and cultural (in)translatibility, we will examine the ways in which Chow's personas might shed specific lights on the socio-political-cultural contexts of Hong Kong in the 1990s through the present.

Although it is not the course requirement, this course assumes certain prior familiarity with Chow's work (for example, having seen at least 3 of his films) for the benefit of all students involved.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course encourages close textual study of reading materials and using your readings to reflect on your spectatorial and consuming experiences. Two presentations plus one paper related to the topics covered are expected from each student. Students are expected to be able to finish the weekly readings before they come to class, and attend all the screenings, lectures and tutorials. While Chow has been and is still evolving as a widely consumed cultural phenomenon, students are strongly encouraged to contribute screening and reading materials to enrich the course. Newspaper clippings, film reviews and media trivia will also be added to the course as study materials. Students are expected to be mature and open-minded in discussing the meanings of sometimes controversial, sometimes upsetting and sometimes very mundane (or "local") subjects including slangs and "dirty" jokes. While students are encouraged to think and speak their minds freely and honestly, this does not include mindless and careless dismissal of reading materials. Students are expected to constantly challenge their own preconceptions and/or biases and to be ready to be challenged.

GRADING

Continuous Assessment	30%
Completion of course readings, viewing and reading assignments and active participation in class discussion and presentation. Attendance in screenings, lectures and tutorials.	
Class Presentations	40%
Take Home Exam	30%

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (subject to change according to student progress)

Jan 24 Week 1 Introduction

Think of a memorable moment from Chow's films to share and tell us why.

Jan 31 Week 2 Hong Kong Comedy Genre

The Last Message 天才與白癡 (Michael Hui, 1975)

The Magnificent Scoundrels 情聖 (1991)

Jenny Lau (2000) "Besides Fists and Blood: Michael Hui and Cantonese Comedy", *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*, eds. Poshek Fu and David Desser, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 158-175.

Feb 7 Week 3 Chinese New Year Holidays

Feb 14 Week 4 Just Joking

Love is Love 望夫成龍 (1990)

Excerpts from Sigmund Freud (1960) [1905] *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, NY: W.W. Norton and Co.

Susan Purdie (1993) "The Butt: The Third Position" *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*. Hertfordshire, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 58-70.

Feb 21 Week 5 Class: No Money No Talk

All for the Winner 賭聖 (1990)

Tricky Brains 整蠱專家 (1991)

Benjamin K. P. Leung (1996) Chapters 2 and 3, *Perspectives on Hong Kong Society* 29-74.

Feb 28 Week 6 Class: Survival

Love on Delivery 破壞之王 (1994)

Excerpts from Alan Dale (2000) *Comedy is a Man in Trouble: Slapstick and American Movies*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ron Jenkins (1994) "Urban Slapstick and Survival" and "America's Comedy of Detachment" in *Subversive Laughter: The Liberating Power of Comedy*, New York: The Free Press.

Mar 6 Week 7 Class: The Undead

Out of the Dark 回魂夜 (1995)

Annalee Newitz (2006) "Introduction: Capitalist Monsters," *Return of the Undead*, Durham and London: Duke, 1-12.
Mid-term presentations.

Mar 13 Week 8 Gender: Masculinity

Fight Back to School series 逃學威龍 (1991-3)

Agnes Ku (2005) "Masculinities in Self-Invention: Critics' Discourses on Kung Fu-Action Movies and Comedies" in *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, Laikwan Pang and Day Wong eds. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 221-238.

Supplementary Reading:

孫隆基 (1995) 《未斷奶的民族》，臺北：巨流，頁 1-29。

Mar 20 Week 9 Gender: Masochism

The Flirting Scholar 唐伯虎點秋香 (1993)

Miriam Hansen (1991) "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and female spectatorship", *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill, London and New York: Routledge, 259-282.

Mar 27 Week 10 Gender: Homosocial Desire

My Hero 一本漫畫闖天涯 (1990)

Cynthia J. Fuchs (1993), "The Buddy Politic", *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, London and New York: Routledge, 194-210.

Supplementary Reading:

Fredric Jameson (1995) Chapter 3, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: cinema and space in the world system*, Bloomington: Indiana and London: BFI, 45-66.

Apr 3 Week 11 Race: Identification

From China with Love 國產零零漆 (1994)

Forbidden City Cop 大內密探零零發 (1996)

Diana Fuss (1995) "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and The Politics of Identification", *Identification Papers*, 141-165.

Law Wing Sang (2006) "The Changing Structure of Feelings in Hong Kong Undercover Movies," *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly of Social Studies* 60, 145-177.

Apr 10 Week 12 Race: Changing as Permanence

King of Comedy 喜劇之王 (1999)

Sixty Million Dollar Man 百變星君 (1995)

Linda Chiu-han Lai (2001) "Film and Enigmatization: Nostalgia, Nonsense, and Remembering" *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, ed. Esther C.M. Yau, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 231-50.

Mary Douglas (1996) "The System Shattered and Renewed", *Purity and danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*, London and New York: Routledge, 159-179.

Apr 17 Week 13 Race: Chineseness as Kung Fu

Kung Fu Hustle 功夫 (2004) or

Fist of Fury 1991 新精武門1991 (1991)

Excerpts from Bruce Lee films

Siu Leung Li (2001) "Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity,"
Cultural Studies 15 (3/4), 515-542.

S. V. Srinivas (2005) "Kung Fu Hustle: a note on the local" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6.2.

Apr 24 Week 14

Student Presentations.

May 2 11am

Exam due. No extensions allowed.