Prof. Chris Berry (King’s College, London)

Taiwanese Cinema and the National

Chris Berry is Professor of Film Studies at King’s College London. In the 1980s, he worked for China Film Import and Export Corporation in Beijing, and his academic research is grounded in work on Chinese cinema and other Chinese screen-based media, as well as neighboring countries. Primary publications include: (with Mary Farquhar) Cinema and the National: China on Screen (Columbia University Press and Hong Kong University Press, 2006); Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China: the Cultural Revolution after the Cultural Revolution (New York: Routledge, 2004); (edited with Nicola Liscutin and Jonathan D. Mackintosh), Cultural Studies and Cultural Industries in Northeast Asia: What a Difference a Region Makes (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); and (edited with Feii Lu) Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005).

General description:

Film critics often talk about “national cinema.” But what about a place like Taiwan? Whether as part of the Japanese empire until 1945, or as part of a putative “Republic of China” ever since, Taiwan has never been formally recognised as a modern nation-state in its own right. Yet, Taiwan is a polity with a distinct people and culture. Taiwan’s cinema has been shaped by the island’s relation to the national question, and it has participated in shaping thinking about that question. This module will consider topics such as:

- how cinema tells history, ranging from the linear and state-endorsed narratives of Chineseness under the Kuomintang to the Taiwan New Cinema of the 1980s and its focus on the locally specific.
- the use of gender, sexuality and ethnicity to tell stories about what an ideal or typical Taiwanese person is, from the hard-working “Oyster Girl” of the 1960s film of the same name, to the recent queer romance cycle as a sign of democratic Taiwan’s progressiveness, and the problematic use of aboriginal Taiwanese as signifiers of Taiwanese culture and identity.
- whether Taiwan’s cinema manifests a post-colonial “Japan complex” of idealizing the former colonial power.

Organization of the day:

09:00-10.30 Lecture 1: The History of Film Production and Consumption on Taiwan

10.45-12.15 Lecture 2: Taiwan History and Cinema Historiography: The ‘Japan Complex’ in Taiwan Cinema

12.30-13.30 Lunch break

13.45-15.15 Lecture 3: Gender, Sexuality and Race in Taiwan Cinema

15.30-17.00 Student Presentations
Topics for student presentations:

- Taiwanese cinema and soft power
- Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s style and themes
- Tsai Ming-Liang’s style and themes
- The Taiwanese-language cinema of the 1950s and 1960s
- Contemporary Taiwanese documentary cinema
- International film festival culture and its impact on Taiwanese cinema
- Taiwanese commercial cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, and its collapse in the 1980s.
- Healthy Realism in Taiwanese Cinema of the 1960s

Bibliography:

Berry, Chris and Feii Lu, ed. Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005.


