

**Samurai, Cowboy, Shaolin Monk:  
National Myths and Transnational Forms in Literature and Film  
EAAS V3608**

Instructor: Paize Keulemans

Class: M/W 1:10-2:25

Screenings: Tues 7:30-9:30

First offered as an ExEAS course at Columbia University in Spring 2005

**Course Description:**

This course will focus on the ties between Japanese, Hong Kong, and American film and literature by investigating the interaction among three particular genres: the samurai story, the western, and the martial-arts tale. In particular, the course will investigate the way these three different genres, despite the heavy cross-cultural borrowing taking place, have posited cowboys, samurai, and shaolin monks as the heroic embodiment of a particular national essence. To do so, the class centers on the close reading of cinematic and literary texts, both investigating texts that have been crucial in the construction of a “national” tradition and texts that have self-consciously sought to cross national and generic boundaries.

Within this framework, the class will revolve around the discussion of certain recurring themes that are closely tied to the imagination of the nation. Themes to be discussed include the moral and political implications of representing violence as an aesthetic form, the role of landscape as the geographical embodiment of the nation, narratives of physical/psychological/national redemption, the representation of the male body in action, the ambivalent role of technology in enabling the production of the national myth yet also threatening its pristine origins, the role of woman as a symbol of domesticity, and the use and abuse of the ethnic other. By juxtaposing texts from different traditions, students will discover not only how such recurrent themes are crucial to the production of a national image, but also how these themes are far from essential to one particular nation in that plot-lines, techniques, and themes are borrowed, reinterpreted, or rejected as they cross national and cultural boundaries.

**Course Expectations**

1. Active class participation
2. Bi-weekly essay, to be posted on the web
3. Five-minute in-class presentation on final paper
4. Final paper (10-15 pages)

Please complete assigned readings in time to participate actively in class discussion. If you miss class, contact a classmate to catch up on notes and announcements. You will be expected to attend all classes, including the Tuesday evening screenings. Attendance will be taken regularly. You are allowed two unexcused absences. After that you need to inform me of the reason for your absence and only serious illness and family emergencies will be accepted. After your two allowed absences, failure to be present will result in lowering your grade half a point.

You will be expected to write a two-page think piece once every two weeks and post it on the web. The think piece will be a brief essay focusing on the readings of that particular week and answering one of two essay questions posted. These essays are due on Sunday at 5 pm, so that your fellow students (and the instructor) will have the opportunity to read the essays before Wednesday's class. In total you will be expected to write six such essays. Each essay counts for 5% of your total grade.

You are expected to write one final paper: The choice of paper topics is up to you. To make sure that you have a suitable topic, come and see me the first week after spring break and give me a topic. Be sure to hand me an outline (with topic sentence) by week 12. You will furthermore be expected to give a brief presentation on your final paper during the last week of class.

### **Evaluation**

The final grade breaks down as follows:

Final paper	30%
Biweekly essays	30%
Class participation	30%
Presentation on final paper	10%

### **Readings**

There are two books that you are expected to buy. These can be found at Labyrinth Books.

- Colonel W.F. Cody, *Buffalo Bill's Life Story*, New York: Turtle Point Press, 2002.
- Takeda Izumo, Miyoshi Shōraku, and Namiki Senryū, *Chūshingura (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers)*, translated by Donald Keene, New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.

All other readings will be included in the course packet. The course packet will be printed in two parts, the second part being printed in the fourth week; the first part is \$21.00. Both packets are available from Broadway Copy Center, 3062 Broadway (at 121 St.)

Films will be shown as separate screenings, at which your presence is required (attendance will be taken). Additional copies of the films will be available at the media center in Butler. Film clips will consist of brief scenes shown in class for comparative purposes.

### **Course Schedule**

- **Week 1: Introduction**

#### **Part One: National Myths**

#### **Week 2: The Emperor and the Assassin: The Beginning of Imperial History**

- **Fiction:** Sima Qian, "Letter in Reply to Ren An," pp. 136-142; "The Prince of Wei," pp. 145-154; "Shi Ji 124: The Biographies of The Wandering Knights," pp. 409-418.
- James Liu, *The Chinese Knight Errant*, pp. 1-40.
- Grant Hardy, "Confucian Reading II," pp. 169-193, in *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian's Conquest of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

### **Week 3: The Emperor and the Assassin: A Nationalist Reinterpretation of Empire**

- **Film:** Zhang Yimou, *Hero* (2003).
- Wang Ban. "Chapter 2: Writing China: The Imaginary Body and Allegorical Wilderness," pp. 55-until 'Symbol and Allegory,'" and "Chapter 5: The Sublime Subject of Practice." In *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. Pp. 154-193.
- Eng, Robert. "Is *Hero* a Paean to Authoritarianism?" ([www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp](http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp))
- Charles Taylor, "*Hero*." ([http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/review/2004/08/27/hero/index\\_np.html](http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/review/2004/08/27/hero/index_np.html))

### **Week 4: 47 Ronin: Tokugawa Demilitarization and the Birth of the Samurai Spirit**

- **Play:** Takeda Izumo, Miyoshi Shōraku, Namiki Senryū, "Act 1-7 and 11," pp. 29-124 and 171-180, in *Chushingura*.
- Ikegami, Eiko. "Chapter 10-11." In *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. Pp. 197-240.

### **Week 5: 47 Ronin: Remilitarizing the Samurai Spirit in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

- **Film:** Kenji Mizoguchi, *Genroku Chūshingura*, 1941, Part I.
- Hurst, C. Cameron III. "Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushidō Ideal." In *Philosophy East and West* 40:4 (October 1990): 511-27.
- "Fundamentals of Our National Polity." In *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. Edited by Ryusaku Tsunoda et al. NY: Columbia UP, 1964. Pp. 785-795.

### **Week 6: Buffalo Bill: The Myth of Manifest Destiny**

- **Fiction:** Cody, William F, "Chapter 1, Chapter 4, Chapter 10, Chapter 11, Chapter 13." In *Buffalo Bill's Life Story*, pp. 1-48; 111-137; 286-296; 297-303; 314-328.
- Richard Slotkin, "Introduction" and "'The White City and the Wild West: Buffalo Bill and the Mythic Space of American History, 1880-1917,'" in *Gunfighter Nation: The myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum, 1992, pp. 1-28 and 63-87.

### **Week 7: Buffalo Bill: Spectacle, Technology, and Nation**

- **Film:** William Wellman, *Buffalo Bill* [1944]
- **Clips:** *More Treasures from American Film Archives* (1894-1931)
- Abel, Richard. "'Our country'/Whose country? The 'Americanisation' Project of Early Westerns." In *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*. Edited by Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson. London: British Film Institute, 1995. Pp. 77-96.
- Whissel, Kristen. "Placing the Spectator on the Scene of History: The Battle Re-enactment at the turn of the century, from Buffalo Bill's Wild West to the Early Cinema." In *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*. 22.3 (2002): 225-243.

## **Part Two: Transnational Forms**

### **Week 8: Japanese “Originals”: From Ford to Kurosawa**

- **Film:** Akira Kurosawa. *Yojimbo* (1961).
- **Clips:** George Steven, *Shane* (1953), John Ford, *The Searchers* (1956)
- Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro, “Seven Samurai,” in *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 205-245.
- Yoshioka Hiroshi. “Samurai and Self-colonization in Japan.” In *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge, and Power*. Edited by Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh. London: Zed Books, 1995. Pp. 99-112.

### **Week 9: The Samurai Crosses the Pacific, the Cowboy the Atlantic**

- **Film:** Sergio Leone, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964).
- Christopher Frayling, “The Cultural Roots’ Controversy—Sergio Leone’s Films: The Sources,” pp. 121-159 in *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*. London/New York: I.B. Tauris 1998.

### **Week 10: Diasporic Identity and the Hong Kong Western**

- **Film:** Sammo Hung, *Once Upon a Time in China and America* (1997), 102m.
- Rodriguez, Hector. “Hong Kong Popular Culture as an Interpretive Arena: The Huang Feihong Film Series.” *Screen* 38.1 (Spring 1997): 1-24.
- Tan See Kam, “Chinese Diasporic Imaginations in Hong Kong Films: Sinicist Belligerence and Melancholia,” *Screen* 42:1 (2001):1-20.

### **Week 11: Bruce Lee, In Hong Kong and Harlem**

- **Film:** Lo Wei, *Fist of Fury* (1972)
- Tasker, Yvonne. “Fists of Fury: Discourses of Race and Masculinity in the Martial-arts Cinema.” In *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*. Edited by Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997. Pp. 315-336.
- Stephen Teo, “Bruce Lee: Narcissus and the Little Dragon,” pp. 110-121.
- Prashad, Vijay. “Bruce Lee and the Anti-Imperialism of Kung Fu: A Polycultural Adventure.” In *Positions* 11:1 (2003): 51-90.

### **Week 12: Shaolin Myths in Hollywood: Kung Fu**

- **Film:** Alex Beaton, Robert Butler, *Kung Fu* (1972). 60m.
- Hunt, Leon. “Burning Paradise: The Myth of the Shaolin Temple,” in *Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Tiger*. London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003. Pp. 48-75.
- Desser, David, “The Kung Fu Craze: Hong Kong Cinema’s First American Reception.” In *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*. Cambridge, New York, and Oakleigh, Melbourne: Cambridge University press, 2000. Pp. 19-43.
- Tasker, Yvonne. “Re-orienting the Television Western: *Kung Fu*.” In *Action TV: Smooth Operators, Tough Guys and Foxy Chicks*. Edited by Anna Gough-Yates and Bill Osgerby. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. Pp. 115-126.

### **Week 13: Hollywood Samurai: From ‘Shogun’ to ‘The Last Samurai’**

- **Film:** Edward Zwick, *The Last Samurai* (2003) (154m)
- **Fiction:** James Clavell, *Shogun*, pp. 15-41.

- Smith, Henry . “James Clavell and the Legend of the British Samurai,” “Japan, Japan, and the Attractions of an Opposite,” and “The Paradoxes of the Japanese Samurai.” In *Learning from Shōgun: Japanese History and Western Fantasy*. Santa Barbara: Program in Asian Studies, 1980. Pp.1-19, 20-26, 86-98.
- LaFleur, William. “Death and Karma in the World of Shogun.” In *Learning from Shōgun: Japanese History and Western Fantasy*. Santa Barbara: Program in Asian Studies, 1980. Pp. 71-78.

#### **Week 14: Animating Cowboys in Japan: The Noodle Western**

- **Film:** Shinichiro Watanabe, “Cowboy Bebop” (1998)
- Napier, Susan. “Anime and Local/Global Identity.” In *Anime From Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. New York: Palgrave, 2000. Pp. 15-34.
- Looser, Tom. “From Edogawa to Miyazak: Cinematic and Anime-ic Architectures of Early and Late Twentieth-century Japan.” In *Japan Forum* 14.2 (2002): 297-328.

#### **Week 15: Conclusion and Presentations**

##### **Filmography:**

- Beaton, Alex and Robert Butler. *Kung Fu*. USA. 1972. 60m.
- Hung, Sammo. *Once Upon a Time in China and America*. Hong Kong. 1997. 102m.
- Kurosawa, Akira. *Yojimbo*. Japan, 1961. 110m
- Leone, Sergio. *A Fistful of Dollars*. Italy, 1964. 99m.
- Lo Wei. *Fist of Fury*. Hong Kong. 1972. 110m.
- Mizoguchi, Kenji. *Genroku Chūshingura*, 1941, Part I. 121m.
- Watanabe, Shinichiro. *Cowboy Bebop*. Japan. 1998. 75m
- Wellman, William. *Buffalo Bill*. USA. 1944. 90m.
- Zhang Yimou. *Hero*. PRC. 2002. 96m
- Zwick, Edward. *The Last Samurai*. USA. 2003. 154m.