



ASIAN 356 / RCHUMS 374 - 001

## Contemporary Chinese Performance Culture 当代中国表演艺术文化

Course Time and Location: MW 5:30-6:50 PM, 1405 MLB

Instructor: Dr. Emily Wilcox

Office Location: South Thayer 5159 (5<sup>th</sup> Floor)

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00 PM and by appointment

Email: [eewilcox@umich.edu](mailto:eewilcox@umich.edu)

### Course Description

This course examines twenty-first century Chinese culture through the lens of performance. Starting with the 2008 Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremonies, the course uses significant works as case studies to examine a range of genres in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Chinese performance culture: global mass mediated performance, avant-garde theater, dance, tourism productions, popular music, and intercultural Chinese opera. Students will learn to examine these works as cultural texts embedded in local, national, and global histories. They will become fluent in the landscape of performance culture in China, including major artists, organizations, and ideas. In addition, students will become familiar with important thematic and theoretical approaches in Chinese performance and media studies.

### Prerequisites

NONE. No prior knowledge of Chinese language, Chinese culture, or the practice and analysis of performance is required to enroll in this class. All required readings and discussions will be held in English, and students will be introduced to performance terminology and methods at a beginner level.

### **Learning Objectives**

This course meets the expectations for culture content courses in Asian Studies and for the general Humanities requirement. Thus, it is designed both for students with a particular interest in Asian language and culture and for students with little prior knowledge of Asian studies who are taking the course to expand their general broad knowledge of the arts and humanities. To meet both of these requirements, students in this class will

- Learn about the major styles of performance that exist in contemporary China, and understand their development in the context of historical, political, economic, and social change during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries;
- Become familiar with important artists in the world of contemporary Chinese performance culture;
- Gain experience watching and analyzing influential contemporary Chinese performance works, through structured reading, viewing, and writing assignments;
- Appreciate and understand ways in which performance culture in China differs from that in other parts of the world, especially the United States, and reflect on these differences in the context of cross-cultural comparison and global exchange;
- Conduct independent research on a topic of the student's choice related to the course, and have an opportunity to publish this research on a website dedicated to expanding awareness about Chinese performance culture to English-speaking audiences.

### **Course Materials**

This course takes advantage of materials available for free to students through the UM Library, the Language Resource Center, and other campus units. All required course readings and viewings will be provided electronically to students for free via the Canvas course site or the Internet. No additional purchased readings are required for this course.

### **Grading**

This course is designed for cumulative learning in which students receive regular feedback on their progress and have many opportunities to improve. For this reason, students are evaluated on a series of small assignments spread out through the semester, rather than a few large exams at the end of the term. Students may find this approach demanding on a weekly basis, but it should alleviate the pressure of midterm and final exam preparation and offer a more authentic reflection of sustained student engagement during the course. Students will also have opportunities to earn extra credit throughout the semester.

Requirements for this class and the percentage breakdown for the final course grade are as follows, with detailed explanations for each item explained below:

Attendance and Participation	15%
Performance Analysis Papers (5 total)	35%
Reading/Viewing Quizzes	30%
Research Presentation	10%
Final Project Blog	10%

**Attendance and Participation:** In-class discussions and explorations of the assigned readings and viewings are a very important part of this class, in which all students are expected to be active participants. Students will be given a grade after each class that assesses their in-class participation for that day. The average of these grades will constitute the overall participation grade. Participation grades will be given on a scale of 0-7, taking into account the following

factors: attendance, timeliness, respect for other students and the instructor, contribution to large group discussions, contribution to small group discussions, preparedness (having access to the assigned readings/viewings during class, being prepared to discuss the assignment for the day) and level of intellectual engagement as demonstrated in quality of contributions. The lowest participation grade will be dropped.

Performance Analysis Papers: In place of exams, students will complete short papers analyzing the five Cast Study performances. These short papers present an opportunity for students to develop an original analysis of the performance, drawing on the in-class discussions, research presentations, and assigned readings and viewings for each Case Study. Each Performance Response will be approximately 2-3 pages double-spaced. Further instructions for each Performance Response will be posted on Canvas. Due dates are indicated in the Schedule below. Late assignments will be accepted with a penalty of 5% per 24-hour period past the deadline.

Quizzes: Periodically, the professor will give pop quizzes at the beginning of class to assess students' preparation of the assigned readings and viewings for that day. Unlike assignments, there will be no prior warning for quizzes, which could happen at any time. Quizzes are designed to provide incentives for keeping up with the course readings, as well as a system to identify and reward students who consistently complete the reading and viewings on time. If a student is absent or late on the day of a quiz, s/he may make it up within one week with a 50% penalty. If the absence is excused, the student can make up the quiz for full credit. Excused absences will be granted with a doctor's note, documentation of required campus business, or permission from the Dean of Students. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

Research Presentation: Students will be required to give one research presentation on a key artist in contemporary Chinese performance culture. The specific individuals and dates of presentations are listed in the Schedule below, and students will sign up for their presentation dates on the first day of class. The goal of the research presentations is to allow you to conduct independent research to gain a deeper understanding of this artist, then to combine oral presentation and multi-media to share what you learn with the class. Research Presentations should cover the following material:

- Biographical information about the individual;
- At least two major works associated with the individual (either specific artistic works or larger artistic or political movements);
- The relevance of this individual to the course themes, reading, and/or viewings;
- Your own evaluation of why the individual is important and/or what she or he has contributed to contemporary Chinese performance culture;
- Ample visual images to illustrate each part of your content.

Research presentations will last between 12 and 15 minutes, and they must include both of the following elements: 1) a video component of approximately 2-5 minutes in total (could be several smaller clips) not from one of the required viewing assignments; 2) an interactive element that engages your classmates in active participation in some way; 3) a final slide that includes a bibliography of sources used in your research. Students should email their presentation slides to me at [ewilcox@umich.edu](mailto:ewilcox@umich.edu) by 5:30 PM on the day of their presentation. A grading rubric will be posted on Canvas for students to view ahead of time.

Final Project: In place of a final exam, students will complete a final media project for this class, using the Wordpress website “Contemporary Chinese Performance Culture”: <http://ccpc.asian.lsa.umich.edu>. The goal of this website is to provide knowledge about contemporary Chinese performance culture to English-speaking audiences. Students will select a topic of their choice (a specific artist, cultural movement, performance series, etc., ideally something not already discussed at length in this class) to explore in more depth and present to the public via a blog post. Students are expected to do outside research for this project, as well as to contextualize the selected topic in the material learned in class during the semester. Students will be introduced to Wordpress through in-class workshops, and there will be technology assistants on-hand to help students with any problems they may encounter in using the Wordpress technology. The professor will provide students assistance with locating primary sources and supporting research material. Students are also encouraged to reach out to UM reference librarians to help with their research.

### **Additional Course Policies**

Office Hours: Office hours present a precious opportunity for you to get to know the professor, to get advice on your assignments, and to get questions answered about course material. Take advantage of them! Everyone is encouraged to attend office hours at least twice during the semester, including once during the first half of the semester (before fall break). You can use office hours to talk about ideas for your research presentation and/or final project, to get feedback on a recent assignment, or to talk about the class and your interests in general. Times and locations can be found at the top of this syllabus. You do not need an appointment to attend regular office hours.

Disabilities and Special Accommodations: This course is intended to be accessible to students with all abilities and special circumstances. Students needing special accommodations for documented disabilities or other reasons should present requests in writing within the first three weeks of classes in order to ensure plans can be made to comply with these needs.

Language: All required readings and viewings for this class will be in English or have English subtitles. Students who can read Chinese are encouraged to take advantage of Chinese source materials for your student presentations and final research projects.

Videos: Due to the audio-visual nature of performance culture, students will frequently be required to watch performance videos as part of the homework for this course. Some materials are posted in the Canvas “Media Gallery.” However, the majority of videos will be viewed using Internet links. You can find these links in the Schedule below. If you do not have access to Internet to stream videos at home, you may use a UM computer lab on campus to view the videos, such as the Language Resource Center or the Askwith Media Library.

Required Performance Viewing: Students are required to attend one required performance viewing for this class outside of regular class times. This will count toward the participation grade, so be sure to check in with the instructor. The options for these viewings are listed on the course syllabus. Events that require tickets will be paid for using the course funds. Students are only required to attend one of these events but are encouraged to attend more than one if possible. Please make note of this on your calendar and plan ahead. You are welcome to bring friends to these events.

Extensions/Absence Policy: There will be no extensions for assignments in this class. In general, if an assignment is turned in late, the assignment will be accepted but will receive a penalty. Unexcused absences will result in a 0 Participation grade for that day.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: Plagiarism will result in an automatic failing of this course and possible disciplinary action by the University. It is your responsibility to understand the rules of plagiarism and to cite your sources appropriately in assignments for this course. For your own benefit, please read the following explanation of plagiarism as defined by the UM:

<http://www.lib.umich.edu/academic-integrity/understanding-plagiarism-and-academic-integrity>

Extra Credit: Extra credit opportunities may be available during the semester for events happening on campus related to the course content. If students hear about such events, please email the professor for approval and distribution to the class. Students who attend these events should submit a one-paragraph response using the “Extra Credit” assignment on Canvas. Each Extra Credit event attended will translate to a .5% increase on the final course grade. Students may submit a maximum of 6 extra credit assignments.

Classroom Community: All students are of equal importance and value in this classroom. If you ever feel that your ability to participate and learn in this class is limited by the behavior of the professor or of other students, please let the professor know immediately so that change can be made. The professor welcomes student input at all times and on all aspects of the class. In the process of humanistic inquiry, we may at times differ in our ideas and our personal experiences. Let us join in celebrating these differences (and similarities), and let us work together to make this classroom safe space for the expression of all views and all backgrounds.

## SCHEDULE

Week 1

**Wednesday, Sept 4 – Course Introduction**

No assigned readings

Case Study I. The 2008 Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremonies

Week 2

**Monday, Sept 9 – Performing China on the World Stage**

VIEW *Beijing 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony*. English NBC version (Canvas Media Gallery), Note: focus on Part 1; skim Part 2

- Research Presentation: Zhang Yimou 张艺谋 (Director)
- Research Presentation: Zhang Jigang 张继钢 (Choreographer)

**Wednesday, Sept 11 – Sight and Sound in the Opening Ceremonies**

READ Chwen Chwen Chen, Cinzia Colapinto, and Qing Luo. 2012. “The 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Visual Insights Into China’s Soft Power.” *Visual*

*Studies* 27(2): 188-195.

READ Francesca R. Sborgi Lawson. 2011. "Music in Ritual and Ritual in Music: A Virtual Viewer's Perceptions about Liminality, Functionality, and Mediatization in the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games." *Asian Music* 42(2): 2-18

- Research Presentation: Shen Wei 沈伟 (Choreographer)

Week 3

**Monday, Sept 16 – Context and Significance of the Beijing Olympics**

READ Susan Brownell. 2008. "Introduction: What the Olympic Games Mean to China." In *Beijing's Games: What the Olympics Mean to China*, pp. 1-17.

- Research Presentation: Liu Yan 刘岩 (Dancer)

❖ **Performance Analysis #1: due Wednesday, Sept 18 at 5:00 PM on Canvas.**

Case Study II. Jay Chou *The Era World Tour* (2010)

**Wednesday, Sept 18 – Panel: The Chinese Hip Hop Experience\*\***

[https://i.umich.edu/lrccs/news-events/events\\_detail.html/64930-16491247.html](https://i.umich.edu/lrccs/news-events/events_detail.html/64930-16491247.html)

\*\*Note: Today's class will take place in Room 1010, 10th Floor Event Space Weiser Hall

- Live Performance #1: Detroit Chinatown Festival, Saturday, Sept 21<sup>st</sup>, 11 PM-5 PM (only required to attend 1.5 hours), Hart Plaza, Detroit (free travel voucher available for the Detroit Connector)  
<http://www.detroitchinatownllc.com/event/>

Week 4

**Monday, Sept 23 – Jay Chou's Musical Flexibility**

VIEW Jay Chou 2010 *The Era World Tour*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMcOIOyWanw>

- Research Presentation: Jay Chou 周杰伦/周杰倫 (Musician)
- Research Presentation: Vincent Fang 方文山 (Lyricist)

- Live Performance #2: Yandong Grand Singers  
Tuesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 7:30-9pm, Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre

[https://i.umich.edu/lrccs/news-events/events\\_detail.html/64719-16434925.html](https://i.umich.edu/lrccs/news-events/events_detail.html/64719-16434925.html)

**Wednesday, Sept 25 – Categorizing Music in Contemporary China**

READ Frederick Lau. 2008. "Constructing National Music." In *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 30-58 (includes listening assignments in CD).

- Research Presentation: Peng Liyuan 彭丽媛 (Musician)

Week 5

**Monday, Sept 30 – NO CLASS**

**Wednesday, Oct 2 – Development of Chinese Rock Music**

READ Andrew Jones “Cui Jian and the Ideology of Rock Music.” In *Like A Knife: Ideology and Genre in Contemporary Chinese Popular Music*. Ithaca: East Asian Program at Cornell University, pp. 115-143.

- Research Presentation: Cui Jian 崔健 (Musician)

Week 6

**Monday, Oct 7 – Pop Music from Taiwan and Hong Kong**

READ Marc L. Moskowitz. 2010. “Chapter 1: The Tail Wags the Dog,” and “Chapter 2: China’s Mandopop Roots.” In *Cries of Joy, Songs of Sorrow: Chinese Pop Music and its Cultural Connotations*, pp. 1-29.

- Research Presentation: Deng Lijun/Teresa Teng 邓丽君/鄧麗君 (Musician)
- Research Presentation: Faye Wong 王菲 (Musician)

**Wednesday, Oct 9 – Jay Chou’s Mandopop Hybridity**

READ Wei-Hsin Lin. 2013. “Jay Chou’s Music and the Shaping of Popular Culture in China.” In *Popular Culture in Asia: Memory, City, Celebrity*. Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 206-219.

READ Anthony Fung. 2008. “Western Style, Chinese Pop: Jay Chou’s Rap and Hip-Hop in China.” *Asian Music* 39(1): 69-80.

VIEW Jay Chou Music Videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qct0JLjaHDc> (“East Wind Breaks”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0p6pNWxpCKw> (“Dad, I Have Come Back”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5sTKJeTegs> (“Nunchuks”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaM7qG2ycjk> (“Hair Like Snow”)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9o20U91aJdg&list=PLGuohxIRpEft85QS\\_hPUw3yb5vaeWTa27](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9o20U91aJdg&list=PLGuohxIRpEft85QS_hPUw3yb5vaeWTa27) (“Cowboy On the Run”)

<http://jaychoustudio.com/jay-chou-translations/fragrance-of-rice/123> (“Fragrance of Rice”)

❖ **Performance Analysis #2: due Sunday, Oct 13 at 5:00 PM on Canvas.**

Case Study III. Yang Liping’s *Dynamic Yunnan* (2004)

Week 7

**Monday, Oct 14 – NO CLASS (Fall Break)**

**Wednesday, Oct 16 – Yang Liping’s *Dynamic Yunnan***

VIEW *Dynamic Yunnan* 2004 (10-year anniversary version):

<https://www.kanbilibili.com/video/av15349652?from=search&seid=16594122993286245345>

- Research Assignment: Yang Liping 杨丽萍 (Dancer/Choreographer)

Week 8

**Monday, Oct 21 – Creative Methods in Chinese Dance**

READ Emily Wilcox. 2018. "Dynamic Inheritance: Representative Works and the Authoring of Tradition in Chinese Dance." In Levi Gibbs, ed. special issue "Faces of Tradition in Chinese Performing Arts." *Journal of Folklore Research* 55(1): 77-112.

- Research Presentation: Dai Ailian 戴爱莲 (Dancer)
- Research Presentation: Gulmira Mamat 古丽米娜·麦麦提 (Dancer)

**Wednesday, Oct 23 – 'Original Ecology' and Yang Liping's Vision**

READ Ting-Ting Chang. Forthcoming. "Negotiating Chinese Identity Through a Double-Minority Voice and Women's Dancing Body on the Global Stage: Yang Liping's *Spirit of the Peacock* and Beyond." In *Corporeal Politics: Dancing East Asia*, Katherine Mezur and Emily Wilcox, eds. (University of Michigan Press, 2020), pp. 316-337.

READ Jin Wang. 2015. "Analysis of the Inheritance and Development of Original Ecology Music." *Cross-Cultural Communication* 11(3): 106-109

VIEW Introduction and Interview on Yang Liping's *Dynamic Yunnan* (Youtube): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01SCRGSdxTw>

❖ **Performance Analysis #3: due Saturday, Oct 26 at 11:59 PM on Canvas.**

Case Study IV. Meng Jinghui's *Rhinoceros in Love* (1999)

Week 9

**Monday, Oct 28 – Meng Jinghui's *Rhinoceros in Love***

VIEW *Rhinoceros in Love*. English subtitled version (Canvas Media Gallery)

- Research Presentation: Meng Jinghui 孟京辉 (Playwright/Director)

**Wednesday, Oct 30 – Development of Modern Chinese Theater**

Reading: James R. Brandon. 1993. "China" and "Hong Kong." In *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 26-63.

- Research Presentation: Mei Lanfang 梅兰芳 (Actor)
- Research Presentation: Cao Yu 曹禺 (Playwright/Director)

Week 10

**Monday, Nov 4 – Testing the Boundaries of Avant-Garde**

READ Liang Fei. 2006. "Meng Jinghui, Pioneer of Experimental Theatre in China." *Canadian Social Science* 2(3): 96-99.

READ Rossella Ferrari. 2012. "The Loner and the Crowd: *Rhinoceros in Love*." In *Pop Goes the Avant-garde: Experimental Theatre in Contemporary China*. London and New York: Seagull Books, pp. 275-289.

READ Yuwen Hsiung. 2009. "Emotion, Materiality, and Subjectivity: Meng Jinghui's *Rhinoceros in Love*." *Asian Theatre Journal* 26(2): 250-259.

Wednesday, Nov 6 – NO CLASS

❖ **Performance Analysis #4: due Friday, Nov 8 at 11:59 PM on Canvas.**

Case Study V. William Huizhu Sun and Faye Chunfang Fei's  
*Hedda, or Aspiration Sky High* (2006)

Week 11

**Monday, Nov 11 – *Hedda, or Aspiration Sky High***

VIEW *Hedda, or Aspiration Sky High*. English subtitled version:

<http://vimeo.com/79281206>

READ Henrik Ibsen, 1890. *Hedda Gabler: A Play in Four Acts*.

- Research Presentation: William Huizhu Sun 孙惠柱 and Faye Chunfang Fei 费春放 (Playwrights/Directors/Scholars)

**Wednesday, Nov 13 – History of the All-Female Yue Opera**

READ Jin Jiang. 2009. "Introduction: Opera, Gender, and the City." In *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (University of Washington Press), pp. 3-25.

- Research Assignment: Yuan Xuefen 袁雪芬 (Actress)

Week 12

**Monday, Nov 18 – Theatrical Movement and Intercultural Adaptation**

READ Emily E. Wilcox. 2014. "Meaning in Movement: Adaptation and the Xiqu Body in Intercultural Chinese Theatre." *TDR: The Drama Review* 58:1 (T221) Spring 2014: 42-63.

**Wednesday, Nov 20 – Chinese Opera as Intercultural Theater**

READ William Huizhu Sun. 2009. "Performing Arts and Cultural Identity in the Era of Interculturalism." *TDR: The Drama Review* 53, 2(Summer): 7-11.

READ Tarryn Li-Min Chun. 2014. "Adaptation as Hospitality: Shanghai Theatre Academy Winter Institute 2013 Performance Series." *TDR: The Drama Review* 58(1): 108-117.

❖ **Performance Analysis #5: due Sunday, Nov 24 at 11:59 PM on Canvas.**

Final Projects: Blogging Contemporary Chinese Performance

Week 13

**Monday, Nov 25: Getting Acquainted with the Blog and Word Press**

Reading/Viewing: Samples from 2013 Student Blogs (skim entire site; read at least 5 examples of your choice) <http://ccpc.asian.lsa.umich.edu>

In class: Word Press Workshop

Wednesday, Nov 27 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)

Week 14

**Monday, Dec 2 – Final Project Planning and Preparation**

In class: Research Workshop

\*Final Project Proposals due in class

**Wednesday, Dec 4 – Final Project Presentations**

Week 15

**Monday, Dec 9 – Final Project Presentations**

**Wednesday, Dec 11— Final Project Presentations**

❖ Final Projects are due on Friday, Dec 20 at 5:30pm.