Contemporary Chinese Performance Culture
(ASIAN 280: Topics in Asian Studies/ RCHUMS 334 – 003 Topics in the Humanities)

Instructor: Professor Emily Wilcox, email: eewilcox@umich.edu

COURSE TIME and LOCATION: MW 2:30-4:00PM, B116 Modern Languages Building
OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 10:00-12:00pm, Wednesdays 1:00-2:00pm, Thursdays 10:00-11:00
Office hours also available by appointment via email with 24 hours advanced notice.
OFFICE LOCATION: South Thayer 5159 (5th Floor)

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 21st-century Chinese performance culture: global mass mediated performance, avant-garde theater, modern dance, tourism productions, popular music concerts, acrobatics, intercultural Chinese opera, television, and Chinese musicals. 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.

Note: Absolutely no prior knowledge of Chinese language or culture is required to enroll in this class. All required readings and discussions will be held in English.

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:

- Become familiar with important people in the world of contemporary Chinese performance culture, including directors, performers, and, in some cases, political figures who have had a major influence on the performing arts;
- 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 20th and 21st centuries;
- Gain experience watching and analyzing influential contemporary Chinese performance works, through structured reading, viewing, and writing assignments conducted regularly throughout the semester;
- 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.
Required Texts:
Course Reader (includes readings and videos, available on Ctools)

Note: There will be no laptops or electronic readers allowed in class. Students are advised to prepare hard copies of the readings that they can bring and reference during class discussion.

Grading
Students will be evaluated on the following work (see explanations below):

Attendance and Participation 15%
Unit Assignments 40%
Quizzes 15%
Research Presentation 10%
Final Project 20%

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 at the end of each week that assesses their in-class participation for that week. The average of these weekly 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 for the instructor, contribution to large group discussions, contribution to small group discussions, attendance at office hours (see note below), preparedness (bringing assigned readings to class, having completed the assignment for the day) and level of intellectual engagement as demonstrated in quality of contributions in all of the above.

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! You are expected to attend office hours 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 syllabi. Sign-up sheets and instructions are posted on the professor’s office door on the 5th floor of S. Thayer Hall (across the street from this building).

Unit Assignments: Since there is no Midterm or Final exam for this course, Unit Assignments present the most important opportunity for you to synthesize and demonstrate the knowledge you learn. Each Unit Assignment will be approximately 2-3 pages double-spaced. It will ask you to reflect upon the assigned performance work of the unit through a structured set of questions or tasks that require you to analyze the work in the context of the material presented in the entire unit. Detailed instructions for Unit Assignments will be posted on Ctools at least one week prior to the due date, usually with a weekend in between to provide extra time for preparation. Unit Papers will be due at the start of class, and they must be submitted in hard copy. Unit Assignments submitted late will lose one full grade per day. If a student is absent from class on the day a Unit Assignment is due, the assignment should be submitted by email directly to the
professor before the start of class. In cases of printer malfunction, students may submit the assignment by email for a reduced \( \frac{1}{2} \) grade (still better than submitting it late).

**Quizzes:** Periodically, the professor will give pop quizzes in 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 will take a variety of forms. They 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.

**Research Presentation:** You will be required to give one research presentation together with a classmate, on one of the individuals listed in the syllabus (see the schedule below for specific dates and topics). The goal of research presentations is to allow you to work with your classmates in a creative way to introduce your peers to an important figure in the world of contemporary Chinese performance culture. 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 specific course unit and to contemporary Chinese performance culture more broadly.

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); 2) an interactive element that engages your classmates in active participation in some way. Finally, presentations should demonstrate collaboration between the two partners. Each presentation will receive one grade, so students should work together and see the final product as a shared effort, rather than the work of two individuals.

**Final Project:** Students will complete a final media project for this class, using the Wordpress website “Contemporary Chinese Performance Culture”: [http://lrc-tesuto.lrc.lsa.umich.edu/wp-blogs/ccpe](http://lrc-tesuto.lrc.lsa.umich.edu/wp-blogs/ccpe). The goal of this website is to provide knowledge about contemporary Chinese performance culture to English-speaking audiences around the world. Students will select one topic of interest from the course (a specific artist, cultural movement, performance series, etc.) to explore in more depth and present to the public via a blog post. Students are expected to do some outside research for this project, although a large part of the assignment will be to contextualize the selected topic in the material learned in class during the semester. Since this project will take the place of a final exam, students are expected to use this project as a way to conduct an original synthesis of the knowledge gained in the course, via the analysis of a particular artistic phenomenon that is of interest to you. 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. Final projects will incorporate images and video links into a written paper the equivalent of 8-10 pages double-spaced. Students should start consulting with the professor early in the semester about ideas for the final project. A library session with the UM China Librarian Dr. Liangyu Fu is scheduled toward the end of the semester to provide students assistance with locating primary sources and supporting research material in the UM library. However, students are encouraged to work with the librarian before this session to begin to locate possible source materials.

**Additional Course Policies**

**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 two
weeks of classes (by September 20th) in order to ensure plans can be made to comply with these needs.

**Language:** Chinese-language options of viewings and readings may always be substituted for English-language options if they are identical to the assignments posted. In some cases, I will provide these materials, either on the course syllabus or through Ctools. If students find these materials themselves, they should get prior approval through email before using the Chinese version in place of the English version. These materials are completely optional and only for those who are interested in viewing them. Quizzes and assignments will always be based on the English-language version. All students are encouraged to take advantage of the writing and language resources on campus to improve your writing and language skills.

**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. In most cases, required video material will be posted on Ctools under the “Media Gallery.” I have also provided links to some sources available on the Internet. If you do not have access to Internet to stream videos at home, there are a number of computer labs on campus where you can view the material using a UM computer, such as the Language Resource Center and the Askwith Media Library.

**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 deduction of one full grade per day (see section on Unit Assignments). In the event that a student is absent the day of a quiz, he/she may make up the quiz or exam only if proof can be provided of a serious reason for the absence. This could include a doctor’s note or official documentation of required campus business. All absences will result in a lowering of the Attendance and Participation grade for that week unless the absence is excused by providing the proof listed above.

**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](http://www.lib.umich.edu/academic-integrity/understanding-plagiarism-and-academic-integrity)

**Extra Credit:** Extra credit opportunities will be announced regularly throughout the semester. These may include responding to a performance video not required as part of the regular homework assignments for the course, or attending an outside lecture or event related to the content of the course. Extra credit assignments will be posted on Ctools and announced in class. If you have an idea for an extra credit assignment, please let me know.

**UROP:** I am always seeking the assistance of motivated, bright undergraduates to help with my ongoing research on contemporary Chinese performance culture. If you are interested in working with me through UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program), please sign up to talk about this in Office Hours, or send me an email describing your qualifications and interests.

**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, when they arise!), and let us work together to make this classroom safe space for the expression of all views and all backgrounds.
SCHEDULE

Week 1: Course Introduction
Wednesday, Sept 4
Course Introduction, no assigned readings.

UNIT I. Performing Nation

Week 2: Theoretical Foundations
Monday, Sept 9 – The Role of the Arts in Society
*Research Presentation: Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) 毛泽东

Wednesday, Sept 11 – The Question of Nationalism in the Global Order
*Research Presentation: Zhang Yimou 张艺谋

Week 3: The Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremonies (2008)
Monday, Sept 16 – China Performs for/with the World
Viewing: Beijing 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony. English NBC version to be posted on Ctools Media Gallery. Optional Chinese CCTV version in three parts here:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jthTzbOpul8 (Part 1)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_-CCRu19-k (Part 2)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSyrrzhn6oo (Part 3)
*Research Presentation: Liu Yan 刘岩

Wednesday, Sept 18 – Reviewing the Reviews
*Unit Assignment #1 “Reviewing the Reviews” due in class by the start of class.

UNIT II: Performing Place

Week 4: The Rise of an Industry
Monday, Sept 23 – Tourism in Contemporary China
*Research Presentation: Deng Xiaoping 邓小平

Wednesday, Sept 25 – Site-specific Performances
*Research Presentation: Liu Sanjie 刘三姐
**Week 5: Impression Liu Sanjie (2004)**

Monday, Sept 30 – Tourism Show in Yangshuo

- Reading: China Travel Guide “Impression Sanjie Liu”:

Wednesday, Oct 2 – A Model for Tourism Performance?

*Unit Assignment #2 “The Tourism Performance Model” due in class by the start of class.

**UNIT III: Performing Ethnicity**

**Week 6: Ethnic Minority Performance as Political Discourse**

Monday, Oct 7 – The 56-Minzu Model

- Reading: Mullaney, Thomas. 2010. “Introduction.” In *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*, pp. 1-17
- Viewing: *East is Red* (Scene 6 “Finale”): [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrka_Uqczb8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrka_Uqczb8)
- Viewing: *2012 Fourth Minorities Art Festival of China*:
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUr8loYI5q8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUr8loYI5q8)

*Research Presentation: Siqintariha 斯琴塔日哈

Wednesday, Oct 9 – Staging Sino-Tibetan Relations

- Reading: “Multi-million dollar propaganda spectacle opens in a Lhasa under lockdown”

*Research Presentation: Yang Liping 杨丽萍

**Week 7: Dynamic Yunnan (2004)**

Monday, Oct 14

- No Class (fall study break)

Wednesday, Oct 16 -- Ethnic Minority Performance as Artistic Resistance

- Viewing: Introduction and Interview on Yang Liping’s *Dynamic Yunnan*:
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01SCRGSdxTw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01SCRGSdxTw)
- Viewing: *Dynamic Yunnan* excerpts (April 2013):
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qb7kWCocOdk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qb7kWCocOdk)
- Viewing: *Dynamic Yunnan* (full show):
  - [http://v.ku6.com/show/37vB5uEgmu2Gu3Ou.html](http://v.ku6.com/show/37vB5uEgmu2Gu3Ou.html)

*Unit Assignment #3 “A Different Path?” due in class by the start of class.
UNIT IV: Performing the Avant-Garde

Week 8: Experimental Theatre in Taiwan and the PRC
Monday, October 21 – The Idea of Avant-Garde
*Research Presentation: Stan Lai (Lai Shengchuan) 賴聲川

Wednesday, October 23 – Experimental Theatre after Tian’anmen
*Research Presentation: Meng Jinghui 孟京辉

Week 9: Rhinoceros in Love (1999)
Monday, October 28 -- Rhinoceros in Love
Viewing: *Rhinoceros in Love*. English subtitled version to be posted on Ctools Media Gallery. Optional Chinese only version here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWhHPhXAoRM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWhHPhXAoRM)

Wednesday, Oct 30 Rethinking the Avant-Garde for China
Unit Assignment #4 “What is Chinese Avant-garde?” due in class by the start of class.

UNIT V: Performing Popular Culture

Week 10: Mandopop and the Gendered Taiwan Legacy
Monday, Nov 4 The Taiwanese Roots of Mandopop
*Research Presentation: Wang Fei 王菲

Wednesday, Nov 6 Popular Music in Taiwan
*Research Presentation: Jay Chou (Zhou Jielun) 周杰倫

Week 11: Jay Chou The Era World Tour (2010)
Monday, Nov 11 -- Jay Chou The Era World Tour
Viewing: Jay Chou The Era World Tour
Wednesday, Nov 13
*Unit Assignment #5 “My Favorite Mandopop Song” due in class by the start of class.

UNIT VI: Performing Interculturalism

Week 12: Theatre of Cultural Exchange
Monday, Nov 18 – Diasporic Chinese Theatre
*Research Presentation: David Henry Hwang 黃哲倫

Wednesday, Nov 20 – Chinese Shakespeares
Reading/Viewing: Global Shakespeares Asia Website: http://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/asia/
*Research Presentation: Wu Hsing-kuo 吳興國

Monday, Nov 25

Wednesday, Nov 27
*Unit Assignment #6 “Watching Ibsen as Chinese Theatre” due in class by the start of class.
Library Workshop with UM Chinese Studies Librarian Dr. Liangyu Fu

UNIT VII: Final Projects

Week 14: Selecting a Topic and Conducting Research
Monday, Dec 2
*Final Project Proposals due in class
Word Press Workshop

Wednesday, Dec 4
Final Project Planning and Preparation

Monday, Dec 9
Final Project Presentations

Wednesday, Dec 11
Final Project Presentations
*Final Paper due date: Thursday, December 19th 12:00 NOON.