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 emergences 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:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biweekly essays</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation on final paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
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**Readings**

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


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**

Week 3: The Emperor and the Assassin: A Nationalist Reinterpretation of Empire
- **Film:** Zhang Yimou, *Hero* (2003).
- Eng, Robert. “Is *Hero* a Paean to Authoritarianism?” (www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp)

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*.

Week 5: 47 Ronin: Remilitarizing the Samurai Spirit in the 20th Century
- **Film:** Kenji Mizoguchi, *Genroku Chūshingura*, 1941, Part I.

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.

Week 7: Buffalo Bill: Spectacle, Technology, and Nation
- **Film:** William Wellman, *Buffalo Bill* [1944]
- **Clips:** More Treasures from American Film Archives (1894-1931)

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)

Week 9: The Samurai Crosses the Pacific, the Cowboy the Atlantic
- **Film**: Sergio Leone, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964).

Week 10: Diasporic Identity and the Hong Kong Western
- **Film**: Sammo Hung, *Once Upon a Time in China and America* (1997), 102m.

Week 11: Bruce Lee, In Hong Kong and Harlem
- **Film**: Lo Wei, *Fist of Fury* (1972)

Week 12: Shaolin Myths in Hollywood: Kung Fu
- **Film**: Alex Beaton, Robert Butler, *Kung Fu* (1972). 60m.

Week 13: Hollywood Samurai: From ‘Shogun’ to ‘The Last Samurai’
- **Film**: Edward Zwick, *The Last Samurai* (2003) (154m)

**Week 14: Animating Cowboys in Japan: The Noodle Western**
- **Film:** Shinichiro Watanabe, “Cowboy Bebop” (1998)

**Week 15: Conclusion and Presentations**

**Filmography:**
- Beaton, Alex and Robert Butler. Kung Fu. USA. 1972. 60m.
- 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