

Toolkit: Teaching East Asian Cinema

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Student-Led module design and teaching cinema

I have taught cinema since 2005. As a PhD student I inherited and taught a series of modules such as French National Cinema, Australian Cinema and East Asian Cinema. I would later devise my own modules following the same format via which I had been taught and trained to teach. The role of nation and nationhood remained core as in a 12-week course it was very hard to offer more than a decade by decade charting of a specific cinema and then a few weeks on traditional topics such as genre, stardom or authorship. This often meant that important issues such as race, gender and postcolonialism (in the East Asian context mostly related to the Japanese Empire) became minoritized as we rattled through the dominant history of a cinema. This approach did not speak directly enough to the student's own diversity and experiences and, as I gained more confidence as a teacher, this approach began to bother me more and more. I do not teach in a film department. My school is East Asian Studies and whilst many students will have language and cultural knowledge of a specific region (South Korea, China or Japan) they will rarely have any background in cinema or media. The broader work of East Asian cinema studies, I felt I was just replicating standard modules with little consideration for alternative viewpoints or spaces and about five years ago I made some radical changes.

The current East Asian Cinema module I teach has curriculum which is student-led. I teach in two-hour workshops rather than lecture/seminar as I find that the best way to engage students in a sustained debate. I offer a long list of potential topics in the first week related to a wide range of East Asian cinema elements. I also indicate the number of weeks that each task will take – the students can therefore build their module as they wish. A sample list of the choices I am offering this year include: 1960s politics and protest in Asian cinema (3 weeks), Pre-1945 cinema (3-weeks) Postcolonial Memory in East Asia (3-weeks), Visualising Sex Work in Cinema (2-weeks), the family in Japanese cinema (2-weeks), Ageing Sexuality on film (1-week), Distribution and Circulation (3 weeks), Cinema and the Environment (2-weeks), Slow Cinema (1-week), East Asia and South East Asia in dialogue (3-weeks). I also give the students a chance to offer their own suggestions on topics they are interested in, and where possible I will construct a week (or two) around that. In previous years a group expressed a passion for seishun eiga, a uniquely Japanese film genre. We discussed it and decided to include two weeks at the conclusion of the module where the students suggested the film text and I provided the reading and structure to the workshop. I invite speakers into the class such as film programmers, filmmakers and distributor (often via skype) who can give some real-world insight into the content. I am also a firm believer that to learn about cinema you also need to have a go at creating visual materials. It is only via doing that you can truly appreciate the nature, texture and complexities of the film image. I want students to gain their own opinion about the works they are seeing and to this end, my module is assessed by a creative portfolio (60%) and a shorter end of semester essay (40%) which bring all the academic elements together. The creative portfolio allows them to choose from a series of options including a 2-5 min film, a video essay, a podcast, a journalistic film review or a photo essay. Each week

for the first 6 weeks we spend a portion of the workshop on acquiring creative skills in tasks led by the tutor. The module outline is clear on which creative still will be explored each week and how that links to the topic. For example, in a week on slow cinema we will explore how video essays are made and guide the discussion toward a product they would make themselves.

This form of assessment and the active participation in the students designing the module means that multiple voices and approaches are able to be engaged with. Feedback indicates that students feel empowered and actively involved in their learning. The flows and interactions between nations, topics and methods can be more easily made as we move away from the focus on nationhood to a more wide-ranging, inclusive approach which allows for both historical, aesthetic and creative debates to be engaged with.

Decolonising Film Studies the view from Asia Key texts:

1. Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010) *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, Duke University Press.
2. Chua Beng Huat (2004) Conceptualizing an East Asian popular culture, *InterAsia Cultural Studies*, 5:2, 200-221
3. Saba Hussain & Nazia Hussein (2019) The (im)possibility of decolonising gender in South Asia: a reading of Bollywood's 'new women', *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 4:4-5, 395-413
4. Heasook Tae (2014) From inter-Asia studies toward tricontinental studies, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 15:4, 498-512,
5. Crystal S. Anderson (2014) *Beyond the Chinese Connection: Contemporary Afro-Asian Cultural Production*, University of Mississippi Press.