GCIN2031.

Reinventing tradition: Cultural production in contemporary China

Course Instructor:

Dr. Shubo Zhao (shubo@hku.hk)

Consultation hour: by appointment

Lectures: Wednesday, 2:30 pm - 4:20 pm, CPD-LG.59

Course Description

The course aims to examine how tradition is being reinvented, represented, reproduced and received in the process of cultural production in contemporary China. The course focuses on examining how the emergence and development of the cultural and creative industries in China have been underpinned by the emphasis on the notion of ‘Chinese traditional culture’. The course will be divided into three parts. In the first part, it examines the discourse on Chinese traditional culture in relation to the geopolitics of China. In the second part, the course investigates the changing role of cultural tradition in relation to the emergence of the discourses on the cultural and creative industries and on soft power in China. It focuses on explaining how different forms of traditional cultures such as tea, martial arts, Chinese opera, Chinese medicine and other crafts and arts have undergone rapid marketization and industrialization in the last two decades. In the final part, the course illustrates the process of how traditional cultures have been branded and marketed as cultural products in China by comparing different real-life case studies.

Learning Objectives

On successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

1) Explain reinvented-traditions as constructions of the processes of history penetrate people’s lives and contribute to the evolution and diversification of human civilization in contemporary China;

2) Describe the changing role of cultural tradition in relation to the emergence of the discourses on the cultural and creative industries and on soft power in China;

3) Grasp the two main approaches— the continuity of time (chuan) and the expansion of space (tong)—to the study of traditions;

4) Understand the process of commercialization of tradition in contemporary China;

5) Examine how traditional cultures have been branded as cultural products in China.

Teaching Methods
Assessment

A. Essay (60%)
The written assignment consists of an essay of around 2500 words in length. You are asked to describe and analyze one kind of cultural production from reinventing tradition in contemporary China (for example: Chinese-style costume, furniture, movie, or food). You should concern your findings with a theoretical analysis which makes use of the course lectures and reading materials. Key elements that should be included are: which kind of cultural production; Introduction of this kind of cultural production; Relationship with traditional Chinese culture; Analysis of the cultural elements; The possibility of innovation. Everything should be handed in as a hard copy to the office of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures (5th Floor, Run Run Shaw Tower), and as a soft copy on Moodle by 5pm on 29 May 2020 (Friday).

B. Short written assignment (40%)
At the end of this semester, you will be asked to write a proposal for “Inventing A Holiday” in Mainland China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong. This assignment will consist of around 1200 words. Everything should be handed in as a hard copy to the office of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures (5th Floor, Run Run Shaw Tower), and as a soft copy on Moodle by 5pm on 29 May 2020 (Friday).

Here’s how to organize your proposal:
- Introduction - What is your general idea?
- Context - why do this now?
- Interpretations – What is the relationship with Chinese traditions?
- Holiday design - How to celebrate the holiday?

Further details of the assessment will be discussed in class.

Tentative Course Outline

1 Lecture 1: Course introduction and overview of reinventing tradition (5/2/2020)
Reading

Lecture 2: Chinese traditional culture in relation to the geopolitics of China (12/2/2020)
Reading

1 The tentative schedule is subject to change.
Lecture 3: Cultural Production of Eating and drinking (4/3/2020)

Reading

Lecture 4: Cultural Production of Chinese Architecture (11/3/2020)

Reading

Lecture 5: Cultural Production of Traditional Culture Education (18/3/2020)

Reading


Reading

Lecture 7: Cultural Production of Dating and Marriage (1/4/2020)

Reading

Lecture 8: Family Values and Corporate Culture (8/4/2020)

Reading

Lecture 9: Case I: The Palace Museum (15/4/2020)

Reading

Lecture 10: Case II: Peony Pavilion (22/4/2020)
Reading

Lecture 11: Case III: Square Dance (29/4/2020)
Reading

Lecture 12: Case IV: WeChat Red Envelope (6/5/2020)
Reading

Lecture 13: Case V: Kung Fu Hustle and Kung Fu Panda (13/5/2020)
Reading