

## **Course Introduction**

Course: Images and Society

Course code: 01834330

Instructor: Wu Jing

School of Journalism and Communication

Image is a mode of communication that, along with text and sound, constitutes the symbolic system of our society. With the development of media technology, one of the significant features of modern society is the pervasiveness of images in every corner of people's lives. On the one hand, this expands people's perceptual range and life experiences, and on the other hand, it supplements or replaces many traditional forms of expression, such as text and conversation. Compared to various other modes of expression, the allure of images is evident because they provide us with an intuitive, sensory, relaxed, and spectacular mode of expression. Images have become a favored medium in many societal communications, including advertising, news, propaganda, entertainment, etc., further propelling society towards an image explosion. Images have gone beyond mere phenomenon to become a unique cultural landscape in society.

This course is designed for students who are interested in and concerned about visual culture, as well as the social construction and roles of images. The focus of the course is to introduce and discuss the important media that constitute contemporary visual culture—photography, film, television, and digital new media—along with their technical, social, and cultural aspects. The course covers three main aspects: first, introducing visual culture theory and social theory, exploring the techniques and ways of visual expression, the process of people interpreting and experiencing visual symbols, and the social relationships caused by observation; second, briefly introducing the cultural and social history of the emergence, development, and importance of these media, with a focus on the process and reasons for the formation of usage patterns in society; third, through case discussions, examining the interaction between images and social consciousness, exploring how images maintain, question, or change some important concepts in modern society, such as gender concepts, ideas about nature and science, national consciousness, class consciousness, etc. These three aspects are interwoven to form a critical examination of the relationship between images and society.

Textbooks: There is no single textbook for this course. Each class will have corresponding reading materials, and a recommended reading list is provided at the end.

## **Course Missions:**

Through this course, students will be able to:

1. To understand the extent and ways in which image culture shapes and influences popular concepts of contemporary society.
2. To have a basic understanding of the history and evolution of several major visual media technologies and institutions, as well as preliminary knowledge of the methodology and perspectives for studying social history of media.
3. Have a certain level of reading ability in visual culture theory to analyze various current social phenomena.

### **Course Outline**

The course content is divided into three units, with a total of 10 lectures of 3 hours each. The reading materials listed below each class are essential and should be completed before class. There will be 5 discussion sections during which we will discuss relevant topics based on screening or field visit of visual culture sites.

#### **\*\*Unit 1: Visual Culture Theory and Paths of Visual Analysis\*\***

**Lecture 1.** Social Theory of Visual Culture I: What is "seeing"? The formation of vision and subjectivity; the sociality of seeing; the power relations established by seeing

**Reading Materials:**

Michel Foucault, Part Three, Discipline, "Docile Bodies," "The Means of Correct Training," "Panopticon," Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, pp. 153-258

Tony Bennett, "The Political Rationality of the Museum," in The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics. (Political Modernity)

**Lecture 2.** Social Theory of Visual Culture II: The emergence of visual modernity; How visions are organized

**Reading Materials:**

Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" (Aesthetics of Modernity)

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, chaps 2, 3, pp. 35-67.

Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity*, chapter 1 "Seeing Modern China: Toward a Theory of Ethnic Spectatorship"

**Lecture 3.** Social Theory of Visual Culture III: Spectacle culture and modern technology; the relationship between spectacle and social governance, social control, democratic politics, and civic participation; Reading images

**Reading Materials:**

David Roberts, "Towards a Genealogy and Typology of Spectacle: Some Comments on Debord," *Thesis Eleven* 2003, 75: 54.

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected chapters

**\*\*Unit 2: Social History of Visual Media \*\***

**Lecture 4.** Social History of Photography: The relationship between photography as a new medium and painting; Art Vs. Science; Imagination Vs. Reality; Social Use of Photography

**Reading Materials:**

Walter Benjamin, "Brief History of Photography," "The Philosophy of Photography"

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility", in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, 2008, pp. 19-55.

Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Definition of Photography," edited by Chen Yongguo, "Visual Culture Research Reader."

John Berger, "Uses of Photography - To Susan Sontag," "The Philosophy of Photography"

**Lecture 5.** Film: Art, Technology, Industry, and Social History

**Reading Materials:**

David, Bordwell. *Reinventing Hollywood: How 1940s Filmmakers Changed Film Story-telling*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 2017

Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," [Logang, Gu Zheng] Visual Culture Reader, pp. 102-121.

**Lecture 6.** - Television, Radio, and Information Technology: Media Public Sphere in Modern Ideals; National Identity and Public Service Broadcasting

**Reading Materials:**

Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, Chapter 2-4

Dayang & Katz, *Media Events: A Live Broadcast of History*.

Moore, Chapter V, "TV, Geography and Mobile Privatization", in *Media and Everyday Life in Modern Society*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2000.

**\*\*Unit 3: Social Criticism through Visual Materials\*\***

**Lecture 7.** Documentary, Reality TV, and Dissatisfaction: Market Mechanisms, Digital Technology, and the Reconstruction of Documentary Ideas (also on live broadcasting, variety shows, and cross-media narration)

**Reading Materials:**

John Corner, "Civic Visions: Forms of Documentary," from *Television Form and Public Address*.

Wu & Yun, "Beyond Propaganda, Aestheticism and Commercialism: The Coming of Age of Documentary Photography in China", in *Javnost-the public*, Vol. 14, (2007), No. 3, pp. 5-22.

Mark Andrejevic, "The Kinder, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother: Reality TV in the Era of Digital Capitalism"

Ib Bondebjerg, "Public Discourse/Private Fascination: Hybridization in 'True-Life-Story' Genres" in *Television: The Critical View, sixth edition*, edited by Horace Hewcomb.

## ***Peking University Summer School International 2025***

**Lecture 8.** Orientalism, nationalism and identity negotiation in visual cultures; Representing the Other: How we reproduce self-awareness through the representation of the Other; Class, Gender, and Racial Relations in the representation of the Other

**Reading Materials:**

Jane Collins and Catherine Lutz, "Becoming America's Lens on the World: *National Geographic* in the Twentieth Century".

Xiao, Zhiwei. "Movie House Etiquette Reform in Early-Twentieth Century China," *Modern China* (October 2006), Vol. 32, No. 4: 513-536.

Chow Rey, "China as documentary: Some basic questions (inspired by Michelangelo Antonioni and Jia Zhangke)," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2014 Vol. 17 (1) 16-30.

Barabantseva, E., "Change vs. Order: *Shijie* Meets *Tianxia* in China's Interactions with the World," *Alternatives* 34 (2009), 129-155.

Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity*, chapter 1 "Seeing Modern China: Toward a Theory of Ethnic Spectatorship"

**Lecture 9.** Public Images, Collective Memory, and Identity:

**Reading Materials:**

"Walls, Screens, and Images: Analyzing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," Visual Culture Reader, edited by Logang and Gu Zheng

Wu Jing, "Chapter 3: The Politics of Images and Historical Memory: Ethical Entanglements of Representing the 'Massacre,'" Visual Expression of Cultural Modernity: Seeing, Gazing, and Gazing

**Lecture 10.** – Tourism, the countryside, the peasants and modernization aspirations

**Reading Materials:**

John Urry, *Tourist Gaze*. Chapters TBA

Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, selected pages

Brass, T., "Peasants, Academics, Populists: Forward to the past?" *Critique of Anthropology*, 2015, vol. 35 (2) 187-204.

Griffiths, M., Chapman, M. and Christiansen, F., "Chinese Consumers: The Romantic Reappraisal," *Ethnography* (2010), 11 (3): 331-375.

**Student Assessments and Grading:**

1. Reading Reports (30%)
2. Analysis of visual events or culture by your own choice (30%)
3. Participation in discussion sections (40%)

Detailed guide lines TBA