

Distributing Chinese Films Online for Research and Teaching: Needs, Platforms, and Opportunities

Christopher Rea

UBC Asian Studies

chris.rea@ubc.ca

No more showing the DVD in the classroom

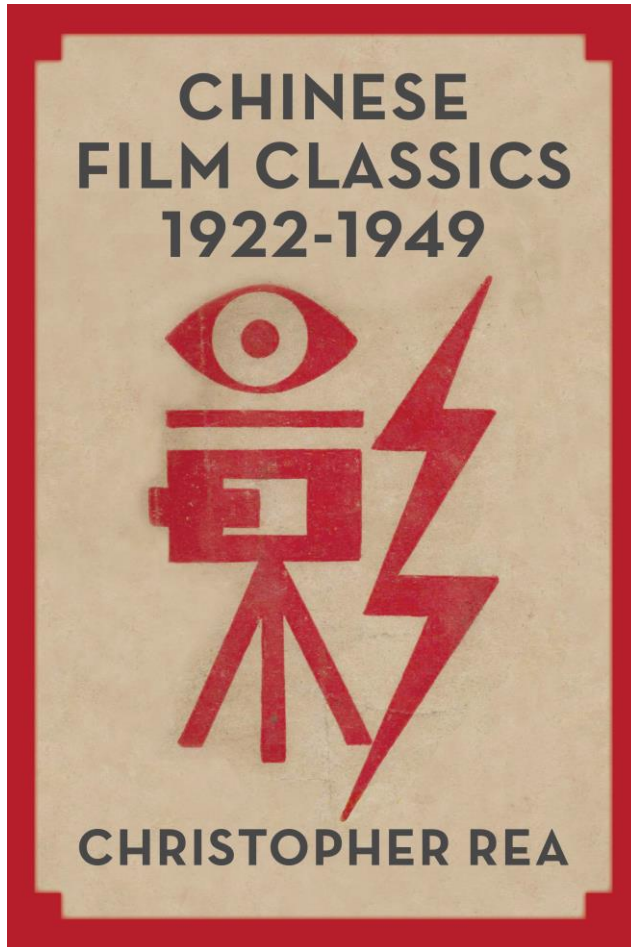


Film needs:

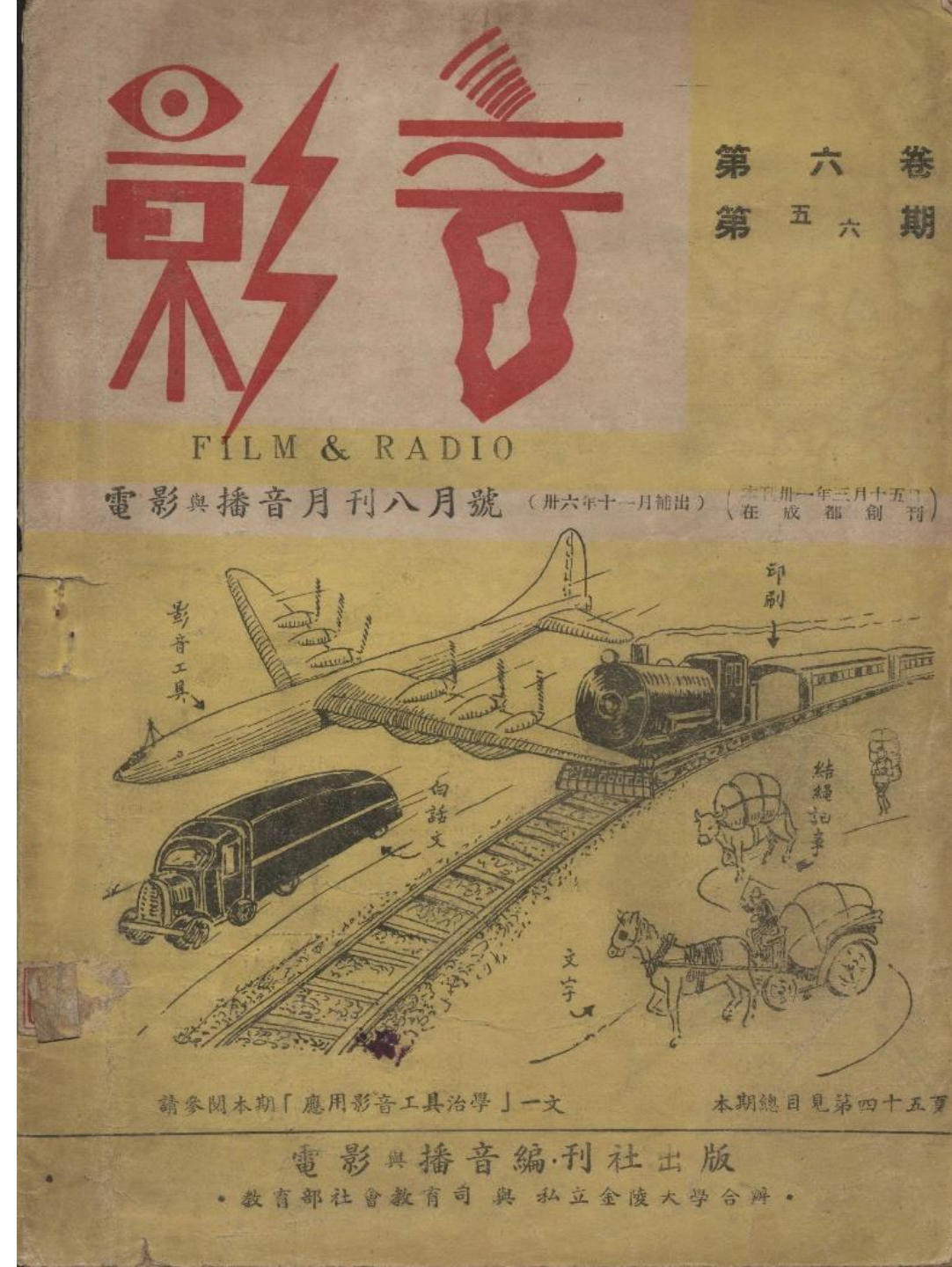
A researcher-educator's perspective in 2022

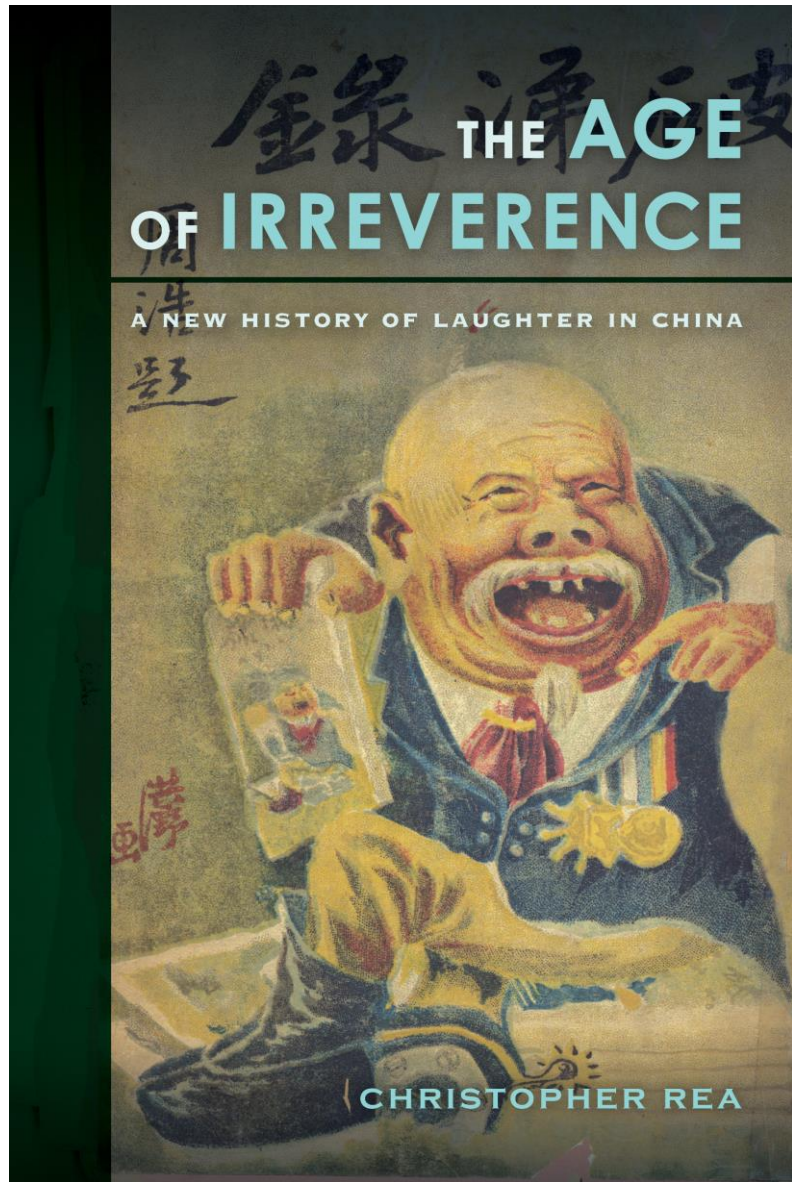
- Online copies of films
- Acceptable image and sound quality
- Available on demand (time & location)
- Subtitled in English
- Low or no cost to students or instructors
- No legal liability for instructor

Two examples of
my dependence on libraries



Thanks, U.C. Berkeley C.V. Starr East Asian Library!





Thanks, Columbia University C.V. Starr East Asian Library!

How can we make Chinese films
more available – via either
password-protected or
public online platforms?

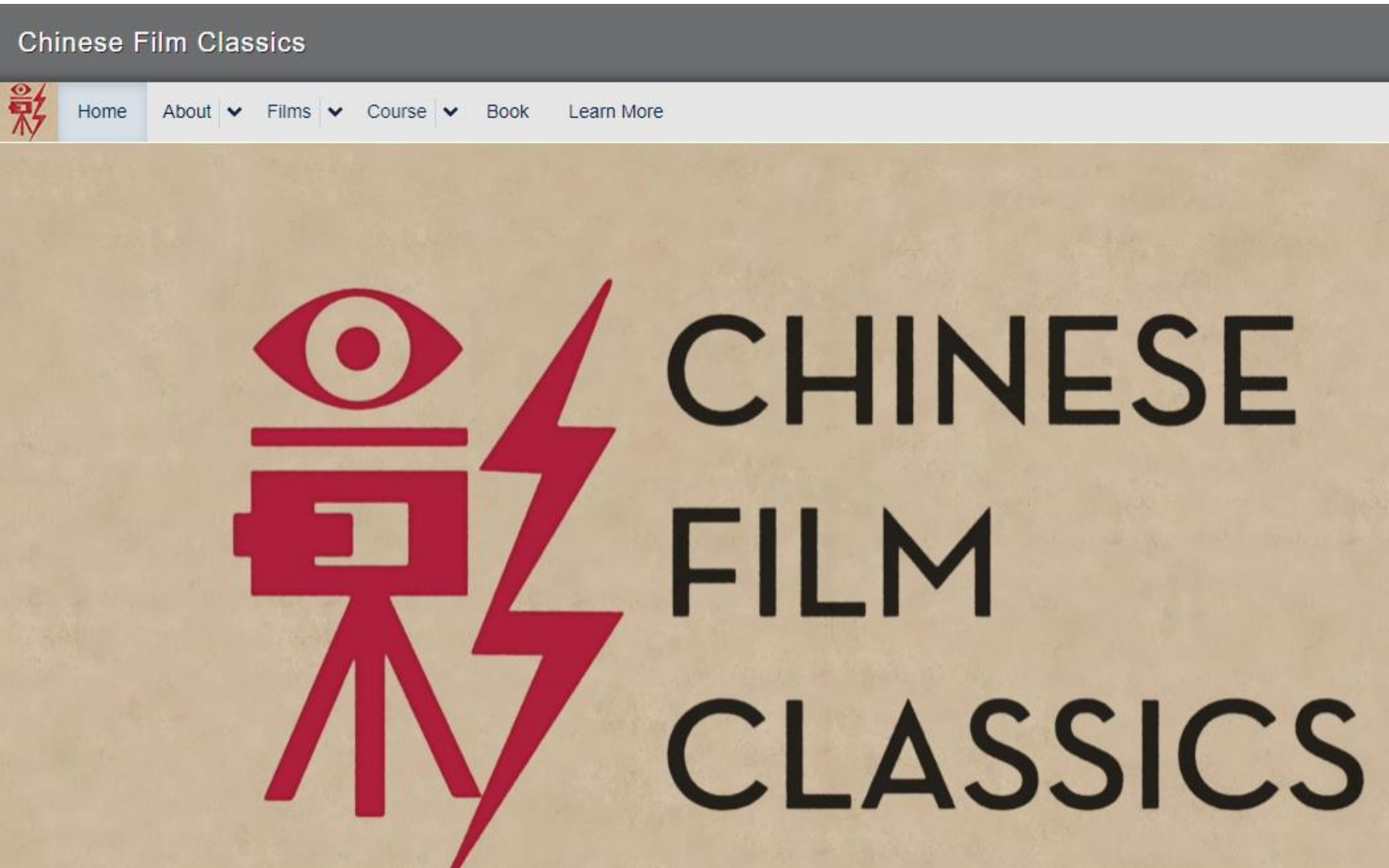
Outline

1. Introducing the Chinese Film Classics project
 - Website & YouTube channel
2. What about films still under copyright?
3. Online film publishing trends in the teaching/research community
 - What can libraries do?
4. Further viewings and readings

ChineseFilmClassics.org

A resource on early Chinese cinema

25+ subtitled films



Laborer's Love 勞工之愛情 (1922)

Love and Duty 戀愛與義務 (1931)

The Peach Girl 桃花泣血記 (1931)

Spring Silkworms 春蠶 (1933)

Playthings 小玩意 (1933)

Daybreak 天明 (1933)

Song of the Fishermen 漁光曲 (1934)

Sports Queen 體育皇后 (1934)

Goddess 神女 (1934)

The Great Road 大路 (1934)

City Scenes 都市風光 (1935)

Song of China 天倫 (1935)

New Women 新女性 (1935)

Song at Midnight 夜半歌聲 (1937)

Street Angels 馬路天使 (1937)

Hua Mu Lan 木蘭從軍 (1939)

Princess Iron Fan 鐵扇公主 (1941)

Love Everlasting 不了情 (1947)

Long Live the Missus! 太太萬歲 (1947)

Spring River Flows East 一江春水向東流 (1947)

Spring in a Small Town 小城之春 (1948)

Wanderings of Three Hairs the Orphan 三毛流浪記 (1949)

Crows and Sparrows 烏鴉與麻雀 (1949)

Directory of 25+ films (and growing)



Laborer's Love 勞工之愛情 (1922)

Laborer's Love (Laogong zhi aiqing, 1922) is the earliest known extant complete film made by Chinese filmmakers.



An Untold Tale of the Borderlands 殖邊外史 (1926)

Li Minghui stars as a peasant woman who escapes an arranged marriage to join her true love on the borderlands



Red Heroine 紅俠 (1929)

A poor young woman trains in magic martial arts and revenges her father and her village in this silent wuxia film.



Woman Warrior White Rose 女俠白玫瑰 (1929)

In this partially-extant silent action film, a female athlete becomes a swashbuckling hero and saves the family herding ground from a gang who plans to sell it to foreigners



Collaborations with film archives

Love and Duty 戀愛與義務 (1931)

The film:



Lian'ai yu yiwu 戀愛與義務

Directed by Richard Poh (Bu Wancang)

Screenplay by Chu Shek Lin (Zhu Shilin)

Produced by Lo Ming Yau (Luo Mingyou)

Production Manager: Lay Min Wei (Li Minwei)

Cinematography by Wong Siu Fan (Huang Shaofen)

Art Director: William Kolland (Gao Weilian)

Unrestored film published with permission of the Taiwan Film and Audiovisual Institute 國家電影及視聽文化中心
<https://chinesefilmclassics.org/love-and-duty-1931/>

Films for teaching culture...

Chinese Film Classics

[Home](#) [The Chinese Film Classics Project](#) [Directory of Early Chinese Films](#) [Chinese Film Classics Course](#) [Book](#) [Resources on Early Chinese Cinema](#)

Hua Mu Lan 木蘭從軍 (1939)

The film:



Cantonese actress Nancy Chan (Chen Yunshang) stars as Mulan in this live-action film made in Shanghai during the third year of China's war against Japan. A young woman takes

<https://chinesefilmclassics.org/hua-mu-lan-1939/>

...and history, as well as...

Spring River Flows East 一江春水 向東流 (1947)

The film, in two parts:

Part 1: "Eight Years of Separation and Chaos" 八年離
亂



Part 2: "Before and After the Dawn" 天明前後



...comparisons between Chinese and other cultural contexts



The Haunted House, staircase sequence

1:



The Haunted House, staircase sequence

2:



Clips enable study of both film form and industry trends



Song at Midnight 夜半歌聲 (1937)
opening credits



The fan motif bookends
Long Live the Missus!
太太萬歲 (1947)



Free online course: 22 video lectures on 11 films

Course

Chinese Film Classics: Course Overview



A free, self-paced online course

This course offers an introduction to eleven of the best extant films made in mainland China nationalizing the film industry. What did early Chinese films look like? What stories did Chinese auteurs of early Chinese cinema? How does early Chinese cinema relate to Hollywood, European cinema, and Chinese cinema history? If you're curious about questions like these, this is the course for you.

Each of the eleven modules of this course

- One Chinese film (see list below), with English subtitles
- Two video lectures analyzing the historical, cultural, and cinematic significance of the film
- Basic information about the film's production, cast, and crew

Video lecture 1: "You have a body – put it to work!"

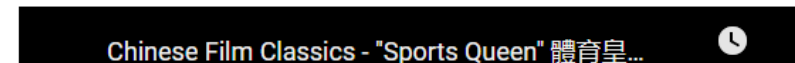


13:31 minutes

Contents:

- Plot summary (minutes 3:30-5:25)
- Star actor Li Lili's healthy, athletic, playful, sexy persona
- China's emerging sports culture
- Storytelling: The coming-of-age narrative of *Sports Queen*

Video lecture 2: Bodies and shapes in motion



About the Course

Module 1: Laborer's Love (1922)

Module 2: Sports Queen (1934)

Module 3: Goddess (1934)

Module 4: The Great Road (1934)

Module 5: New Women (1935)

Module 6: Song at Midnight (1937)

Module 7: Street Angels (1937)

Module 8: Long Live the Missus! (1947)

Module 9: Spring River Flows East (1947)

Module 10: Spring in a Small Town (1948)

Module 11: Crows and Sparrows (1949)

Module 12: Course Wrap-Up

Also available on the Modern Chinese Cultural Studies YouTube channel

Modern Chinese Cultural Studies channel

The screenshot shows the YouTube channel page for 'Modern Chinese Cultural Studies'. The channel has 4.8K subscribers. The main banner image is a color film still from 'Goddess (1934)'. Below the banner, the channel name and subscriber count are displayed. The navigation menu includes Home, Explore, Shorts, Subscriptions, and Library. The video player shows a video titled '"Chinese Film Classics, 1922-1949," by Ch...' with 1,330 views and published 10 months ago. The video description mentions it is published by Columbia University and available in hardcover and paper.

YouTube ^{CA}

Search

Home


Explore

Shorts

Subscriptions

Library

Chinese Film Classics website UBC a

 Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
4.8K subscribers

HOME VIDEOS PLAYLISTS COMMUNITY CHANNELS

Goddess (1934)
"Chinese Film Classics, 1922-1949," by Ch...

"Chinese Film Classics, 1922-1949," by Ch...
1,330 views • 10 months ago

@Modern Chinese Cultural S...
"Chinese Film Classics, 1922-1949,"
By Christopher Rea
Published by Columbia Univ...
Available in hardcover, paper

FILM-RELATED PLAYLISTS:

- Chinese Film Classics
- Chinese Film Classics – online course
- Best of early Chinese cinema
- Sounds and songs
- How-tos from early Chinese cinema
- Gags and special effects
- Shared motifs – China, Hollywood, Europe
- Early Chinese animation

Playlists arrange short film clips thematically


youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhA05Qf-09xAgCdNLbAF3n6PCfu-awo6l

Search

Home
Trending
Subscriptions

Library
History
Your videos
Watch later
Liked videos
Show more

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Music
Sports
Gaming
Movies & Shows



Early Chinese animation

30 videos • 515 views • Updated 4 days ago

Public

Animation, cartoons, and comics in the Chinese film industry, circa 1949 and earlier.
chinesefilmclassics.org

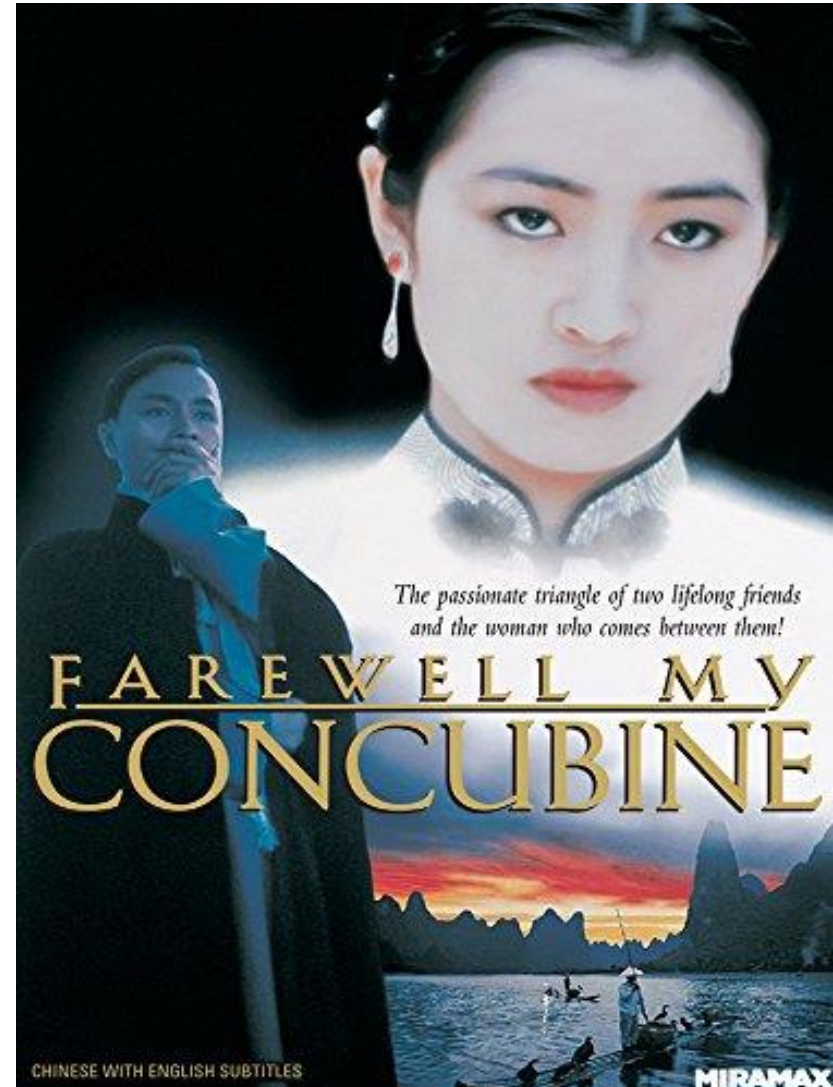
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies

- Animated opening credits - Long Live the Missus (1947)
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
WATCHED 1:24
- Animated line drawing of Sanmao in opening credits - Wanderings of Three-Hairs the Orphan (1949)
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
WATCHED 2:57
- Animated dragon tattoo - Wanderings of Three-Hairs the Orphan (1949)
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
WATCHED 2:56
- Wanderings of Three Hairs the Orphan 三毛流浪記 (1949) with English subtitles
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
WATCHED 1:10:44
- Traitor song 猴子猴 有來頭 - Crows and Sparrows (1949)
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
WATCHED 2:05
- How to ride an (animated) airplane - The Great Road 大路 (1934)
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
WATCHED 3:27

What about films that are still in copyright?

Options:

- Subscription services (Criterion on Demand, etc.)
- Rentals on GooglePlay, YouTube
 - Selection is poor
- Institution-based, password-protected digital repositories



Online film publishing trends in the teaching/research community

ACCESSIBILITY ABOVE ALL

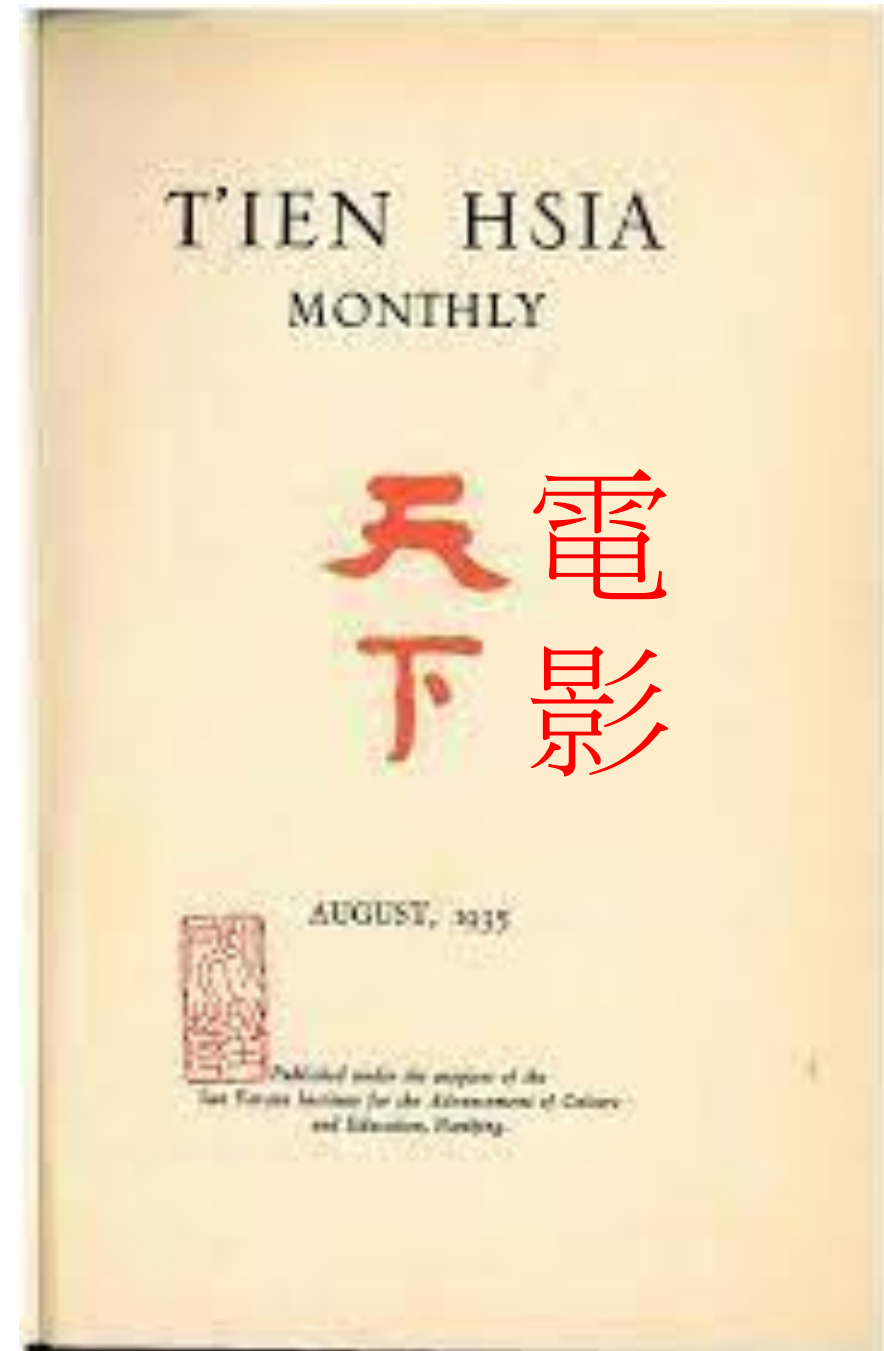
- Most instructors are unlikely to return to the “show the DVD in the classroom” model
- Students want/expect on-demand film availability
- Institutions increasingly expect flipped classrooms
- Grant funding (for both research and teaching) increasingly emphasizes open-access publication
- Modular, modular, modular!

What can libraries do to increase accessibility?

- Advertise to instructors which Chinese films are available (esp. with subtitles) via subscription services
- Liaise with Chinese-language film archives about accessibility, educational rights, and platforms
- If allowable by law, create a password-protected repository of digitized films accessible to members of your institution
- Track when Chinese films enter the public domain

A modest proposal

Create a **shared, inter-institution repository of Chinese-language films** (and other audio-visual materials) accessible to researchers, instructors, and students – starting with a core collection of the most commonly-taught films



Further viewings

- Chinese film repository: chinesefilmclassics.org
- Chinese films & film clips (Modern Chinese Cultural Studies YouTube channel): <https://www.youtube.com/c/ModernChineseCulturalStudies>

The screenshot shows the YouTube channel page for 'Chinese Film Classics'. The page features a search bar at the top, navigation tabs for HOME, VIDEOS, PLAYLISTS, COMMUNITY, CHANNELS, and ABOUT, and a microphone icon. Below the navigation, there is a section for 'Chinese Film Classics' with a 'PLAY ALL' button and a description: 'Full Chinese films, circa 1949 and earlier, with English subtitles. chinesefilmclassics.org'. The main content area displays a grid of video thumbnails with their titles, durations, and view counts. The videos include 'Laborer's Love 勞工之愛情 (1922) with English subtitles', 'An Untold Tale of the Borderlands 殖邊外史 (1926...)', 'Red Heroine 紅俠 (1929) with English subtitles', 'Woman Warrior White Rose 女俠白玫瑰 (1929) with...', and 'Woman Warrior of the Wild River 6: Rumble at Deerhorn...'. Below this grid, there is another section for 'Chinese Film Classics - online course' with a 'PLAY ALL' button and a description: 'Learn about early Chinese contributions to the cinematic arts in these brief video lectures by UBC Professor Christopher Rea about the best Chinese films made up to 1949. chinesefilmclassics.org'. At the bottom, there are several video thumbnails for an 'ONLINE COURSE' and 'CHINESE FILM CLASSICS' series, including 'Five Tips for Getting the', 'Laborer's Love', and 'Sports Queen'.

YouTube ^{CA} Search

HOME VIDEOS PLAYLISTS COMMUNITY CHANNELS ABOUT

Chinese Film Classics ▶ PLAY ALL
Full Chinese films, circa 1949 and earlier, with English subtitles. chinesefilmclassics.org

Laborer's Love 勞工之愛情 (1922) with English subtitles 22:10
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
16K views • 1 year ago

An Untold Tale of the Borderlands 殖邊外史 (1926... 38:07
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
203 views • 1 month ago

Red Heroine 紅俠 (1929) with English subtitles 1:34:45
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
179 views • 2 weeks ago

Woman Warrior White Rose 女俠白玫瑰 (1929) with... 27:09
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
1.6K views • 8 months ago

Woman Warrior of the Wild River 6: Rumble at Deerhorn... 1:14:13
Modern Chinese Cultural Studies
985 views • 7 months ago

Chinese Film Classics - online course ▶ PLAY ALL
Learn about early Chinese contributions to the cinematic arts in these brief video lectures by UBC Professor Christopher Rea about the best Chinese films made up to 1949. chinesefilmclassics.org

ONLINE COURSE CHINESE

CHINESE FILM CLASSICS
Five Tips for Getting the

CHINESE FILM CLASSICS
Laborer's Love

CHINESE FILM CLASSICS
Laborer's Love

CHINESE FILM CLASSICS
Sports Queen

Further readings about the Chinese Film Classics project

New Online Teaching Resources for Early Chinese Cinema



AUTHORS

Christopher Rea

[DOWNLOAD PDF](#)

The Chinese Film Classics Project is a research, teaching, and translation initiative aimed at making early Chinese cinema more accessible to the general public. The centerpieces of the project are two interlinked web resources: (1) the website chinesefilmclassics.org and (2) the YouTube channel Modern Chinese Cultural Studies (<https://tinyurl.com/4zk6wevb>). These sites currently feature twenty-four Chinese films released between 1922 and 1949 with complete English subtitles; over 150 film clips, organized into playlists; and a semester-long online course on Chinese film classics, with a pair of video lectures on each of eleven films. Both online resources are free and do not require login or registration. Additional translated films, film clips, and related materials will be added on an ongoing basis, thanks to contributions from scholars and students around the world.

These films, and the related teaching/learning aids, comprise a valuable resource for educators teaching film studies Chinese language translation popular and mass culture cultural history social history political history

<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/new-online-teaching-resources-for-early-chinese-cinema/>

Short Essay

Love and Duty: Translating Films and Teaching Online Through a Pandemic

Abstract

The Chinese Film Classics project, launched in 2020, is an online research and teaching initiative aimed at making early Chinese films and cinema history more accessible to the general public. Led by Christopher Rea at the University of British Columbia, the project is centered on the website

<http://chinesefilmclassics.org> and the companion YouTube channel Modern Chinese Cultural Studies.

These two platforms together host new English translations of over two dozen Republican era Chinese

Share



Authors

Christopher Rea (University of British Columbia)

Please write to me with your
comments and questions!

chris.rea@ubc.ca



CHINESE

FILM

CLASSICS