Lecture Abstract

In less than a decade – from 1995 to 2002 – three cinematic representations of the first emperor of China, Qin Shiuangdi (259–210 BCE), came out: Zhou Xiwen’s “The Emperor’s Shadow” (1995), Chen Kaige’s “The Emperor and the Assassin” (1998), and Zhang Yimou’s “Hero” (2002). In 2006, commissioned by NYC’s Metropolitan Opera, the New York-based Chinese conductor Tan Dun co-wrote the libretto for “The First Emperor,” which shared the same basic storyline as Zhou’s film.

In one way or another, all four works are set against a mytho-political construction of the first emperor started by Chairman Mao more than half a century ago. Each seeks to depict the emperor’s human, personable, or sympathetic aspects. The paradox is that in their efforts to humanize him, the three directors and the librettist created a new version of the myth of the first emperor, one that reflects a rampantly morphing culture over two decades of unprecedented political changes, social transformations, and economic acceleration.

Sherry Mou

Sherry Mou is an assistant professor of Chinese literature and language in the Modern Languages Department and Asian Studies at DePauw University. Since joining the DePauw faculty in 2002, Professor Mou has offered courses in both modern and classical Chinese literature, including Chinese theater and Chinese cinema, modern Chinese literature and Chinese women writers. Professor Mou received her B.A. in English and American Literatures from Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei, Taiwan, an M.A. in English from Northern Illinois University, an M.A. in Modern Chinese Literature and a PhD in Classical Chinese Women’s History from The Ohio State University.

Contact Information

For more information, contact Jeffrey Chan at chan.184@osu.edu or call (614) 247-6893.