

EALC 499: SPECIAL TOPICS INDEPENDENT CHINESE DOCUMENTARY FILM



FALL 2025 / TUESDAY + THURSDAY / 12:30-1:50 PM

Instructor: John Alexander, Artist in Residence, EALC /// johnrale@usc.edu

Overview:

This seminar explores the emergence and transformation of independent documentary filmmaking in the People's Republic of China. Beginning in the late 1980s, documentary filmmaking outside state-controlled media industries became one of the most dynamic forms of media production in China, and this seminar provides an overview of the significant trends during this period and introduces key debates in the critical scholarship on Chinese documentary film. The course highlights how independent documentary filmmaking has been intertwined with dramatic transformations in Chinese society, politics, and visual culture since the 1980s. The seminar also explores the broader aesthetics, epistemology, and politics of documentary filmmaking practice.

As a compliment to this focus on documentary film history and theory in China, students will have the option to conduct independent research and produce short documentary films for their major assignments, either individually or in small groups. These experiments in documentary film production will allow students to put documentary theory into practice and to respond creatively and collaboratively to the central themes of the seminar.

*All readings for this course will be in English. Knowledge of Chinese is not required.