

Course Title: Spanish Culture Through Film and Image: Comparing Spain and China

Course Code: SPA1303

Year of Study: Open to all

Number of Credits / Term: 3

Mode of Tuition: Tutorial (face-to-face)

Class Contact Hours: 3 hours per week (one session per week) for 14 weeks

Category in Programme: Free Elective

Pre-requisite: None (English proficiency at least level 5 IELTS recommended)

Restriction: Nil

Course Description

This course explores Spanish culture and society through a comparative lens, examining Spain's history, values, festivals and contemporary life in contrast with Chinese contexts. Using film and visual materials as primary tools, students develop critical thinking and visual literacy to analyse how cultural products reflect and shape society. Topics include religion, family and gender roles, regional identities, key historical moments, major festivals, migration and multiculturalism. Throughout the course, students reflect on similarities and differences between Spanish and Chinese cultures and on how media constructs cultural identity.

Aims

The principal aims of this course are to:

- Understand the historical and cultural contexts of Spain from the early 20th century to the present, including the Second Republic, the Spanish Civil War, Franco's dictatorship, the transition to democracy, and contemporary Spain.
- Analyze films critically as cultural documents, identifying how cinema reflects social values, historical conditions, and debates about identity, gender, family, and belonging.
- Develop visual literacy by interpreting photographs, images, and visual media to understand cultural meaning and construct comparative cultural arguments.
- Compare cultural systems systematically, identifying how values, institutions, and practices in Spain differ from and resemble those in China (e.g., family structure, religious practice, gender roles, festive traditions).

- Think critically about culture and identity, moving beyond stereotypes and recognizing the diversity within Spain and across cultures.
- Communicate effectively in English about cultural topics, both in writing and in group presentations, even with modest English proficiency.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of key periods and events in 20th- and 21st-century Spanish history and explain their main cultural consequences in Spain and in comparison with China.
2. Identify and describe central cultural values and practices (family, religion, gender, celebration) in Spain and relate them to equivalent practices in Chinese traditions.
3. Analyze films and visual materials as cultural texts, discussing themes, characters, historical context, media representations and how tourism and globalization shape cultural identity.
4. Construct visual and written comparative arguments using photographs, images and films, and reflect on how studying Spanish culture reveals and challenges their own cultural assumptions.

Indicative Content

(Aligned with course themes across 14 weeks.)

Unit 1 – Historical and Cultural Foundations: Spain in the 20th Century (Weeks 1–3)

- Communicative content: understanding Spain's historical shifts from the Second Republic through the Civil War, dictatorship, and transition to democracy; understanding how these events shaped cultural practices, family structures, and social values.
- Key concepts: religious role in Spanish society, regional identities, gender roles under Franco, cultural memory and collective trauma, transition to democracy and cultural liberalization.
- Film/visual texts: short documentary materials on Spanish history, archival photographs.

- Comparative lens: Chinese history parallels and differences; Hong Kong, China's colonial and contemporary context.

Unit 2 – Religion, Family, and Gender in Spanish Society (Weeks 4–6)

- Communicative content: the role of Catholicism in Spain (historical and contemporary); family structures and changing gender roles; domestic roles and expectations in both Franco-era and contemporary Spain; comparison with Chinese filial piety and family values; gender expectations in Hong Kong, China.
- Key concepts: patriarchy and family authority, secularization trends, women's roles in work and home, changing marriage and partnership practices, religious ceremony vs. secular practice.
- Film/visual texts: *La lengua de las mariposas* (full viewing), *Solas* (full viewing), photographs of family life and domestic spaces.
- Comparative tasks: analyzing family structures, gender roles, religious practice across cultures.

Unit 3 – Regional Identities and Spanish Diversity (Weeks 7–8)

- Communicative content: understanding Spain's regions (Catalonia, Basque Country, Galicia, Andalusia, etc.) and internal diversity; regional stereotypes and prejudices; contemporary autonomy debates (especially Catalonia); regional festivals and cultural practices; comparison with internal diversity in China and ethnic identities in Hong Kong, China.
- Key concepts: regional languages, cultural nationalism, internal migration, regional stereotypes and humor.
- Film/visual texts: excerpts from *Ocho apellidos vascos*, regional festival videos, tourist materials and stereotypes.

Unit 4 – Pilgrimage, Spirituality, and Secular Spain (Weeks 9–10)

- Communicative content: Camino de Santiago as a pilgrimage tradition and modern phenomenon; Spanish secularization vs. spiritual seeking; contemporary religious practice in Spain; pilgrimage and travel as cultural motifs; comparison with Chinese spiritual practices and Hong Kong, China's modernity.
- Key concepts: tradition vs. modernity, spiritual tourism, pilgrimage as personal journey, secularization and faith.
- Film/visual texts: *The Way* (full viewing), documentary materials on Camino, photographs of pilgrimage and sacred spaces.

- Comparative tasks: discussing spirituality, modernity, and tourism across cultures.

Unit 5 – Festivals, Celebrations, and Cultural Values (Weeks 11–12)

- Communicative content: Spanish festivals (Navidad, Semana Santa, San Fermín, Fallas, Feria de Abril, Carnaval) as expressions of cultural values; festive practices, social hierarchies, and transformations; comparison with Chinese New Year, Qingming, and other Chinese celebrations; ethical debates (animal welfare in bullfighting and traditional practices).
- Key concepts: festive calendar as cultural mirror, tradition and innovation, public/private space, class and gender in celebration, ethical tensions in traditional practices.
- Film/visual texts: video clips and photographs of major festivals, advertising and social media representations.

Unit 6 – Integration and Contemporary Reflections (Week 13)

- Communicative content: synthesis of themes across the course; contemporary Spain in global media; migration and multiculturalism in Spain; final reflections on cultural comparison and understanding.
- Key concepts: media representation of Spain, globalization and cultural change, intercultural competence.
- Activities: group presentations, final reflection and discussion.

Teaching Method

The course uses an active, discussion-based learning approach emphasizing visual and textual analysis.

Teaching methods include:

- Full film screenings with guided viewing notes and post-screening discussions.
- Small-group and pair-based analytical activities analyzing scenes, images, and cultural practices.
- Comparative discussion tasks (e.g., "What is similar/different in family practice between Spain and your culture?").
- Individual and group projects combining visual materials with written analysis.
- Role-play and scenario-based activities (e.g., participating in a Spanish festival, navigating cultural differences).

Class size will normally be capped at approximately 20 students to ensure active participation and discussion.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes will be assessed in the following ways:

Learning Outcome	Class Participation & Continuous Work	Film Essay	Film Quiz/Test	Group Photo Project	Oral Presentation
1. Demonstrate knowledge of key periods and events in 20th- and 21st-century Spanish history and explain their main cultural consequences in Spain and in comparison with China.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2. Identify and describe central cultural values and practices (family, religion, gender, celebration) in Spain and relate them to equivalent practices in Chinese traditions.	✓	✓		✓	✓
3. Analyze films and visual materials as cultural texts, discussing themes, characters, historical context, media representations and how tourism and globalization shape cultural identity.	✓	✓	✓		✓
4. Construct visual and written comparative arguments using photographs, images and films, and reflect on how studying Spanish culture reveals and challenges their own cultural assumptions.	✓		✓	✓	✓

Assessment

Assessment is 100% by continuous assessment and follows the University grading system (A–F). Within this 100% continuous assessment, class participation & continuous work function primarily as formative assessment, providing ongoing feedback on students' understanding and engagement.

The individual film essay, film quiz/test, and group photo project (written and oral) are the main summative assessments, used to determine students' final achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Components are:

1. Class participation & continuous work – 20%
2. Individual film essay – 20%
3. Film quiz/test – 20%
4. Group photo project (written component) – 25%
5. Group photo project (oral presentation) – 15%

Overall percentage grades are converted to letter grades using the scale (A = 88–100%, B+ = 85–89%, B = 80–84%, C+ = 75–79%, C = 70–74%, D = 60–69%, F = 39% or below).

Required / Essential Readings

Films (with English subtitles):

- *La lengua de las mariposas* (The Language of the Butterflies) – Dir. José Luis Cuerda, 1999 (99 min)
- *Solas* (Alone) – Dir. Benito Zambrano, 1999 (95 min)
- *The Way* – Dir. Emilio Estevez, 2010 (125 min)
- *Ocho apellidos vascos* (8 Basque Surnames) – Dir. Emilio Martínez-Lázaro, 2014 (97 min; partial viewing)

Recommended / Supplementary Readings

- Documentary clips from RTVE (Spanish public television) on festivals, regions, and history.
- Short articles on Spanish history and culture (provided by the instructor in class).
- Glossaries and concept sheets in English (provided by instructor).
- Photography and visual materials from public sources on Spanish culture and daily life.

Note: All required films will be screened in class during scheduled sessions, so students do not need to arrange access to them independently. Where institutional access is available, optional links or viewing opportunities may be provided, but they are not required for successful course completion.

Important Notes

- 1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations and Course Work. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit the documents for all the assessments using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk>
- (5) Students must adhere to the University’s guidelines and practices when using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. The official documents “Guidelines for Using GAI Tools at Lingnan University” and “Best Practices for Ethical and Responsible Use of GAI Tools in Course Assessments” can be found [here: https://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/generative-artificial-intelligence/gai-guidelines-best-practices](https://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/generative-artificial-intelligence/gai-guidelines-best-practices).

Use of Generative AI

At CEAL we adopt a forward thinking and pragmatic approach to the use of Generative AI by students.

Each assessment will carry guidelines about what type of AI use is acceptable. If you cannot find these, or if they are unclear, please ask your teacher.

If there is a question over the inappropriate use of GenAI (“authorship”) we will carry out an investigation. If you are found to, on the balance of probabilities, have used Gen AI inappropriately, you will be asked to rewrite and resubmit. There will also be a cap on your grade

More information can be found at:  [CEAL Gen AI Policy for students.pdf](#)

Appendix 1 – SPA1303 Assessment Rubrics

A1. Class Participation & Continuous Work (20%)

These tasks are low-stakes and mainly formative: they help students monitor their learning and prepare for the summative assessments.

As this is a discussion-based course, regular attendance is essential.

- Up to 2 absences (for any reason) will not normally affect the participation grade.
- From the 3rd absence onwards, each additional unexplained absence may result in a reduction of the participation mark.
- Repeated late arrivals (e.g. more than 10 minutes late on 3 or more occasions) may also lower the participation grade.

Students with valid reasons (e.g. illness) should inform the instructor in advance where possible.

Criterion	Excellent (A) 5 points	Good (B) 4 points	Fair (C) 3 points	Pass(D) 2 points	Failure (F) 0 points
Attendance & punctuality (0 to 5)	Attends all or nearly all sessions; always on time; informs instructor of absences when needed.	More than two absences or multiple late arrivals.	More than three absences or multiple late arrivals.	More than four absences or multiple late arrivals.	Attendance and punctuality do not meet minimum requirements; seriously hinders learning.
Class discussion engagement (0 to 5)	Speaks multiple times, asks thoughtful questions, listens to peers, builds on others' ideas.	Speaks regularly; participates in group work; shows engagement.	Participates when prompted; offers some voluntary input.	Rarely participates; disengaged.	Almost never participates; shows no meaningful engagement.

Task completion (0 to 5)	All worksheets and reflection assignments submitted on time, showing clear understanding.	Most worksheets completed on time; generally, shows understanding.	Some worksheets incomplete or late; shows partial understanding.	Rarely completes tasks; lacks understanding.	Tasks largely missing or show no effort.
Reflection quality (0 to 5)	Clear ideas; connects to course themes; shows critical thinking and cultural insight.	Addresses themes; shows reflection and some insight.	Addresses assignment but with limited reflection.	Minimal response or superficial engagement.	Off-topic or no meaningful response.

A2. Individual Film Essay (20%)

Assignment: Choose one film (*La lengua de las mariposas*, *Solas*, or *The Way*) and write a 1,000–1,200 word analytical essay in English.

Essay Structure (recommended):

1. **Introduction** (150 words): Name the film, director, year; brief summary (1–2 sentences); thesis statement about what the film reveals about Spanish culture or values.
2. **Body Part A** (250–300 words): Describe one main character and one key conflict. Why is this character/conflict important?
3. **Body Part B** (250–300 words): Choose one scene showing something about Spanish society (family, religion, gender, values). Describe it and explain what it reveals.
4. **Body Part C** (200–300 words): Compare one element of the film with your own culture (Hong Kong, China, or your background). What's different? What's surprising?
5. **Conclusion** (100–150 words): Revisit your main idea. What did analyzing this film teach you about Spanish culture or culture in general?

Criterion	Excellent (A) 4 points	Good (B) 3 points	Fair (C) 2 points	Pass (D) 1 points	Failure (F) 0 points
Understanding of film (0 to 4)	Demonstrates clear understanding of plot, characters, and themes; references specific scenes accurately.	Shows good understanding of main story and characters; references some scenes.	Shows basic understanding; some inaccuracies or vague references.	Misunderstands key elements; few or inaccurate references.	Does not demonstrate understanding of film content.
Analysis & critical thinking (0 to 4)	Makes insightful connections between film and Spanish culture/history; goes beyond plot summary.	Connects film to cultural context; mostly avoids plot summary.	Makes some cultural observations; relies somewhat on plot summary.	Mostly summary; little analysis.	No meaningful analysis; purely descriptive.
Structure & organization (0 to 4)	Clear introduction, body, and conclusion; ideas flow logically.	Generally clear structure; mostly logical flow.	Somewhat disorganized but followable.	Difficult to follow; unclear organization.	Disorganized; incoherent structure.
Comparison with own culture (0 to 4)	Thoughtful, nuanced comparison; shows reflection on cultural differences and similarities.	Makes clear comparison; shows some reflection.	Attempts comparison but somewhat superficial.	Little or minimal meaningful comparison.	No comparison or entirely superficial.

Language use, clarity & length (0 to 4)	Language is generally clear and easy to follow; errors do not impede understanding. Vocabulary is appropriate for the task and level. Essay follows the required length and fully addresses all parts of the prompt.	Mostly clear language; some errors but overall meaning is clear. Vocabulary is adequate. Length is within the expected range and all main parts of the task are covered.	Frequent errors sometimes affect clarity. Limited vocabulary or repetition. Length is slightly under/over the guideline or one part of the task is underdeveloped.	Many errors make reading difficult at times; vocabulary is very limited. Essay is clearly too short/too long or important parts of the task are missing.	Language problems seriously block understanding or the response is far from the required length and does not address the task.
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A3. Film Quiz/Test (20%)

Timing: Week 11 (during class; 60 minutes)

Format:

- 15 multiple-choice questions (1 point each) on film content, dates, and key concepts.
- 2 short-answer questions (5 points each) on themes or cultural comparisons.

Topics covered: Plot and characters from all four films; key historical periods; cultural concepts discussed in class (family, religion, gender, festivals, identity); comparison concepts across cultures.

Scoring: Standard item-based marking scheme with grade boundaries applied.

Note: Assessment includes one in-class film quiz/test in Week 11. This quiz samples all the main Learning Outcomes, but the skills and knowledge it assesses are also continuously developed and reinforced through weekly discussions, worksheets, and short reflection tasks.

A4. Group Photo Project – Written Component (25%)

Assignment: In groups of 3–4, create a visual-textual project exploring one theme:

Possible themes:

- Family spaces and domestic life in Spain vs. Hong Kong, China
- Religion in everyday spaces (public and private)
- Comparing one Spanish festival with a Chinese celebration
- Gender representation in public space and advertising
- Food and social life across cultures
- Migration, belonging, and community spaces

Project Structure:

1. **Photo Collection:** 8–10 images from Hong Kong, China showing your chosen theme + 8–10 images/screenshots from Spain showing the same theme.
2. **Written Commentary (800–1000 words total):**
 - **Introduction** (150–200 words): Introduce your theme and explain why it's interesting. What cultural question are you exploring?
 - **Image descriptions & comparison** (400–550 words): For 3–4 paired image sets, describe what you see and explain what each reveals about the culture. What's similar? Different?
 - **Conclusion** (150–200 words): What did you learn about Spanish culture? About your own culture? Did anything surprise you?

Criterion 25%	Excellent (A) 4 Points	Good (B) 3 Points	Satisfactory (C) 2 Points	Needs improvement (D) 1 Point	Failure (F) (0 Points)
Theme selection & clarity (0 to 4)	Theme is clear, original, and culturally significant; strong planning evident.	Theme is clear and appropriate; good planning shown.	Theme is somewhat clear; basic planning visible.	Theme is vague or poorly defined.	Theme is unclear or not culturally significant.

Photo selection & quality (0 to 4)	Images are well-chosen, clear, and directly illustrate theme; good variety and composition.	Most images illustrate theme; decent variety and clarity.	Images related to theme but some unclear or repetitive.	Images unclear or weakly support theme.	Images do not clearly support theme.
Visual comparison (pairing) (0 to 4)	Compelling paired images that reveal meaningful cultural contrasts; insight evident.	Clear pairing; shows cultural differences; some insight.	Pairs visible but comparisons basic.	Weak or unclear pairing; little comparison.	No meaningful visual comparison.
Written analysis (0 to 4)	Thoughtful interpretation of images; connects to course concepts; critical thinking evident.	Good analysis; makes cultural connections; some depth.	Adequate descriptions; some cultural observation; basic depth.	Minimal analysis; mostly description.	No meaningful analysis; pure description.
Structure, organisation & conclusion (0 to 4)	Essay has a clear introduction, well-organised body paragraphs and a strong conclusion that brings the main ideas together and reinforces the central insight. Transitions make the text easy to follow.	Generally clear structure with introduction, body and conclusion; ideas follow a logical order, though some transitions or parts of the conclusion could be stronger.	Basic structure is present but sometimes unclear or repetitive; conclusion is brief or adds little beyond summary.	Organisation is weak; ideas jump or are only loosely connected; conclusion is minimal or abrupt.	Very poor organisation; no clear introduction or conclusion; ideas are hard to follow.

Note: At the end of the project, each group will submit a short Group Contribution Statement (about 150–200 words) as an appendix to the written report. This statement briefly explains:

- How the group worked together overall
- What each member mainly contributed (e.g., research, taking photos, writing, slide design, presenting).

The project will normally receive a single grade for the whole group, but the instructor may adjust individual grades if the Contribution Statement and class observations clearly show different levels of participation.

A5. Group Photo Project – Oral Presentation (15%)

Format: Each group presents for 10–12 minutes + 3–5 minutes Q&A.

What to cover:

- Your theme and why you chose it (1 min)
- 3–4 key image pairs with brief explanation (6–8 min)
- Main insights and what surprised you (2–3 min)
- Conclusion: What does this comparison teach us? (1 min)

Criterion	Excellent (A) 3 points	Good (B) 2,5 points	Fair (C) 2 points	Pass (D) 1,5 points	Failure (F) 1 to 0 points
Content & organization (0 to 3)	Presents theme and images in clear logical order; all group members contribute meaningfully.	Generally clear organization; most members participate.	Some organization; uneven participation.	Disorganized; poor participation.	Very disorganized; minimal participation.
Image presentation (0 to 3)	Images well-displayed; captions clear; slides enhance understanding.	Images display well; mostly clear labeling.	Images visible but some labeling unclear.	Images hard to see or unclear.	Images incomprehensible or missing.
Speaking & engagement (0 to 3)	Speaks clearly and confidently; makes eye contact; engages audience; good pacing.	Generally clear speaking; adequate pacing; some engagement.	Speaks with some clarity; uneven pacing; minimal engagement.	Hard to hear/understand; poor engagement.	Inaudible or no meaningful engagement.
Insight & analysis (0 to 3)	Makes meaningful observations; references course themes; shows critical thinking.	Makes good observations; references some course themes.	Makes basic observations; little reference to course concepts.	Mostly description; no clear insight.	No analysis or insight evident.

Time management (0 to 3)	Stays within 10–12 minutes + Q&A; uses time effectively.	Mostly within time; generally good use.	Somewhat over/under; some wasted time.	Significantly over/under; poor time use.	Severely exceeds or falls far short of time.
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Appendix 2 – Grading

Grading

Your work on this course will be assessed to the following standards:

Grade	Standard	Percentage	Grade Points
A	Excellent	88% < 100%	4.00
A-		80% < 88%	3.67
B+	Good	75% < 80%	3.33
B		70% < 75%	3.00
B-		65% < 70%	2.67
C+	Fair	60% < 65%	2.33
C		55% < 60%	2.00
C-		50% < 55%	1.67
D+	Pass	45% < 50%	1.33
D		40% < 45%	1.00
F	Failure	<40%	0.00