

UC SANTA BARBARA

# THE *Current*

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[Nora Drake](#)

## Modern Master

Pai Hsien-yung (Kenneth Pai) is more than an expert in modern Chinese literature — he practically invented it. An emeritus professor of East Asian languages and cultural studies at UC Santa Barbara, Pai is considered one of the greatest living writers of Chinese fiction and an author of seminal works of Chinese modernism.

In celebration of his status as a cultural hero, UCSB will honor Pai's life and work with a week of film screenings, roundtable discussions and remarks from the scholar himself. The festivities, organized by the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies, coincide with Pai's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. All events are free and open to the public.

In addition to his writing, Pai is known for his scholarly research and literary activism. His stylized work explores the experiences of what he calls the "wandering Chinese" — meaning those who have emigrated — and is appreciated worldwide for its honest portrayal of the immigrant experience. Many of Pai's stories have been made into films, television shows and stage plays, and the influential literary journal "Modern Literature," which Pai founded in the early 1960s, is considered one of the milestones of modern Chinese prose.

"Professor Pai's stature has brought UCSB great recognition in the Chinese-speaking world and among the wide community of readers who have found meaning and pleasure in his work," said Katherine Saltzman-Li, a professor of East Asian languages and cultural studies and organizer of the celebration. "Each separate event relates to one of his areas of achievement — literature, literary scholarship,

biographical research and writing — and Professor Pai will be part of every discussion.”

Monday, Jan. 16, from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., the UCSB MultiCultural Center will host an all-day event that includes a screening of “Multiflorate Splendour” (with English and Chinese subtitles), a biographical film that highlights Pai’s many accomplishments in literature, scholarship and Chinese opera production. Following a catered lunch, Pai will participate in two roundtable discussions about his films.

The event continues Tuesday, Jan. 17, when visitors have the opportunity to view and learn about selected items from the UCSB Library’s Pai Hsien-yung Collection. East Asian studies librarian Cathy Chiu will discuss the items at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. in Special Research Collections, on the library’s third floor. Admission is free, but [reservations](#) are required.

At 7 p.m., UCSB’s Pollock Theater will screen “The Last Aristocrats” (with English and Chinese subtitles). Based on one of Pai’s short stories, the film follows four young Chinese women from elite families who become stranded in the U.S. after communists take over Shanghai in 1948. Following the screening, Michael Berry, UCLA professor of contemporary Chinese cultural studies, will join Pai for a conversation about the film. Seating is limited and reservations are recommended.

The documentary film “The Critical 16 Days” will screen Jan. 18 at 7 p.m. in UCSB’s McCune Conference Room. Centered on a 1947 anti-government uprising in Taiwan known as “the 2.28 incident,” the film is in Chinese without subtitles. Following the screening, Pai, whose own father played a significant role in the incident, will discuss his book “Images of My Father and the Republic of China” with UCSB’s K.C. Tu, a professor of Taiwan studies.

The week of celebration concludes Jan. 19 with a screening of “Crystal Boys,” a filmed stage version of one of Pai’s most renowned novels at 7 p.m., in UCSB’s Humanities and Social Science Building, Room 1174. The story, about a young gay Taiwanese man who is expelled from school and kicked out of his home because of an affair with a classmate, has been widely translated and adapted into films, television series and theater productions. Pai will give remarks after the conclusion of the film, which also is in Chinese without subtitles.

“We hope that aside from learning about Professor Pai’s accomplishments and the passions that engage him, students, faculty and community members will be

inspired in their own lives to follow the example of a meaningful and committed life such as Professor Pai has demonstrated,” Saltzman-Li said.

More information about all of the events is available on the East Asian languages and cultural studies website, at <https://www.eastasian.ucsb.edu/events/>.

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## **About UC Santa Barbara**

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.