

CURE4008: Global Cultural Theories
The Chinese University of Hong Kong (2025-26 Term 1)
Tuesdays, 2.30pm-5.15pm

Lectures: Li Dak Sum Building (LDS), Classroom 214 (2/F)

Tutorials: Venue 1: LDS, Classroom 214 (2/F)

Venue 2: Lee Shau Kei Building (LSK), classroom 206 (2/F)

TAs: To be confirmed

Medium of Instruction: English

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Why study theories? What does it mean to theorise? For whom do we theorise? Where are potential sites and mediums for theorising to happen? How could we theorise with sensitivities to contexts, particularities and differences, and what are their relations to theories and theorising? This course aspires to engage with some such questions, bearing in mind how engagement with, and the use of theory does not mean theory is universal and abstract, but understood as bodies of thought in response to, and informed by prevailing shifts and complexities they may have been surrounded by.

Departing from the dominant canon of critical theory, this course aims to introduce students to a wider, more diverse range of theoretical texts and frameworks by marginalised voices and from peripheral locations. In the wake of epitaphs about the poverty or death of critical theory, this course explores how theory might have continued significance and impact through its intervention in social reality and creative practice. First, theory could be applied as an analytical tool to comprehend and confront urgent issues of inequality and injustice. Second, theory's entanglement with verbal language could be overcome through asking how film and visual art could potentially offer sources for theorising.

This course seeks to also decolonise theory by multiplying the sites of intellectual and critical inquiry. Instead of treating Benjamin, Adorno, Hall, Mulvey, and Grossberg as representative of the corpus of theory, it engages with prevailing discussions in Postcolonial Studies and Black Studies. It also moves beyond the call for 'de-North Americanisation' by looking at theoretical texts and frameworks produced in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The course concludes by exploring work about environmentalism and technology.

The course is designed for advanced undergraduates with familiarity in critical approaches to literature, cinema, art, and media.

Learning Outcomes:

- To become acquainted with theoretical texts and frameworks in Cultural Studies by marginalised voices from different peripheral social and geographic contexts
- To engage with theory as a body of thought to analyse the articulation of race, gender, memory, and nature in literature, cinema, art, and media
- To formulate, develop, engage with and analyse cultural texts in Asia alongside global cultural theories

Assessment:

Class Attendance and Participation: 10%

You are expected to read the readings, and express your own thoughts and questions relevant to the readings. This would translate to your contribution during class discussions. The questions I am looking for are not factual or general questions (eg. Who is theorist so-and-so, what does 'queer' mean, etc.) that can be quickly answered by searching online. Rather, the questions and thoughts should come from how you have understood the reading, what you may not still understand, or in relation to the theories' ideas/ concepts and argument of the readings.

If you have difficulties understanding the readings, you could use AI translation tools (eg. DeepL, etc.) to translate the article from English to Chinese (unfortunately as of now, there is no Cantonese). The translation is not perfect, but you may be able to get an initial and broad understanding of the article, and at least what the article is trying to say. However, please be prepared that you may need to go back and forth between reading the AI-translated Chinese text and checking it again with the article in English.

Link to DeepL: <https://www.deepl.com/en/translator/files>

Tutorial presentation (10mins each group) and response to two questions (10mins): 15% + 5%

After the add-drop period, 2 groups of students would each present one of the recommended texts for that week, and how this text engages with the theory/idea/ concept covered in lecture that week. The presentation may also include a cultural text of your choice from Asia (eg. Short film clip, poster, advertisement, short segment of a song, artwork, social media video or image, short video game scene or clip, etc). Presentation of the article, theory and your cultural text example may also highlight some new insights, or possible challenges/limitations of these theories.

Short critical reflection (400-600 words): 25%

Choose and comment on a piece of cultural text from Asia, engaging with one theory covered in the course. Your reflection should briefly state your understanding of the theory in your own words, and how and why you think this theory is relevant to the analysis of your chosen cultural text, and how this cultural texts illustrates, expands and/or challenges the theory. Please include proper citation and bibliography. Submission deadline is **10 October (Friday), 11.59pm/2359hrs** on Blackboard with Veriguide.

Final paper (2000-3000 words) and presentation (5-7minutes): 40% + 5%

For this final paper, you could either

1. Choose a cultural text (eg. short story, fairy tale, song, poem) that you may have been discontented with, and rewrite/recreate it (1000-1500 words), after having engaged with one to at most two of the theoretical texts discussed in this course. You would also include a short commentary piece (1000-1500 words), explaining your discontentment with the original cultural text, and how the theories have been relevant in your rewriting of this cultural text; OR
2. Choose two to at most three theoretical texts covered in this course, and analyse it alongside an Asian cultural text. The paper should include your understanding of these theoretical texts' key concepts and ideas, as well as demonstrate how your close and concrete analysis of the cultural text engages with these theories.

For both 1. and 2., please include proper citation and bibliography.

Please submit a proposal summary of your final paper's topic on Blackboard by **7 Nov (Friday), 11.59pm/2359hrs**. It could be written in short paragraphs or bullet points, but no longer than 1 A4 page. Your proposal summary should include which project you are doing (1 or 2), the theories you would be engaging with, together with your Asian cultural text of analysis, and the topics/issues you wish to analyse.

Submission deadline for your final paper is **5 Dec (Friday), 11.59pm/2359hrs** on Blackboard.

Academic Ethics

You are expected to abide by the university's principles and regulations on academic honesty. Please take some time to familiarise yourself with the information on the following webpage: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

Violations such as plagiarised papers or multiple submissions will not be tolerated in any form. These will be subject to disciplinary action. Remember that all words, phrases, or ideas taken from sources other than your own submitted assignment must be properly cited.

I allow the use of AI tools for this course for translations of readings (eg. DeepL), or checking the grammar of your writing (eg. Grammarly). **However, the use of AI to create content in any of your written assignments would have to be declared in your essay, and how AI has contributed to your content.** You should **keep a record of your AI sessions** (including screenshots of prompts and content created by the AI, as well as the time and date of these entries). You should also **cite the AI in your essay and bibliography.**

All written assignments must be accompanied by a VeriGuide receipt, a signed declaration acknowledging your awareness of and subscription to the university's policies and regulations on academic integrity. Written assignments submitted without a VeriGuide receipt will not be accepted and graded.

If you are in doubt about an assignment with a possible violation, please feel free to consult me.

Course Schedule:

Week 1 (2 Sept): What does it mean to theorise culture?

How has culture been typically defined and analysed in Cultural Studies? How can we move beyond dominant frameworks of Cultural Studies?

Required:

- Shih Shu-mei and Françoise Lionnet, "Introduction: The Creolisation of Theory", in *The Creolisation of Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 1-33

Recommended:

- Melani Budianta, "Smart kampung: doing cultural studies in the Global South", *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 16:3, pp. 241-256
- Lawrence Grossberg, "The Heart of Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 7-30

Week 2 (9 Sept): Decolonial Thought/s and Knowledge Production

What are the efforts to uncover alternative methods to the dominant frameworks of knowledge production?

Required:

- Chen Kuan Hsing, "Asia as Method: Overcoming the Present Conditions of Knowledge Production", in *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 211-256

Recommended:

- Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American modernity/ coloniality research program", *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Nos. 2-3, March/May 2007, pp. 179-210
- Raewyn Connell, "Chapter 6: Islam and Western Dominance", in *Southern Theory: the Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 111-137

Week 3 (16 Sept): Image as Critique

How can images from film and visual art offer sources for intellectual and critical inquiry?

Required:

- Laura Marks, "The Memory of Touch," in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 127-193

Recommended:

- Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning," in *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 127-193
- Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), pp. 31-45

Week 4 (23 Sept): Gender

How can feminist or queer readings subvert fixed norms of cultural identity and representation?

Required:

- Ben Tran, "Chapter 1: Autoethnography and Post-Mandarin Masculinity." in *Post-Mandarin: Masculinity and Aesthetic Modernity in Colonial Vietnam* (New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2020), pp. 21–43..

Recommended:

- Maria Lugones, "Chapter 3: On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism", in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorising Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (United States of America: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), pp. 82-91
- Petrus Liu, "Chinese Queer Theory," in *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 34-84

Week 5 (30 Sept): Race

How can theory expose and disturb unspoken structures and practices of racism?

Required:

- Chen, Kuan-Hsing. "Epilogue the Imperial Order of Things, Or Notes on Han Chinese Racism." in *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2020), pp. 257–268.

Recommended:

- Frantz Fanon, "The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized," in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; New York: Penguin, 2019)
- Simone Browne, "B@anding Blackness: Biometric Technology and the Surveillance of Blackness", in *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 89-130

Week 6 (7 Oct): No Class (Day after Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival)

Submission of short critical reflection: 10 Oct (Friday), 11.59pm/2359hrs) via Blackboard with Veriguide.

Week 7 (14 Oct): Migration and Mobility

How do the departures and arrivals of migrants trouble and transform fixed national and ethnic identities?

Required:

- Benedict Anderson, "Introduction" & "Cultural Roots," in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 1-7 & 9-36

Recommended:

- Arnika Fuhrmann, "The Ghost Seer: Chinese Thai Minority Subjectivity, Female Agency, and the Transnational Uncanny in the Films of Danny and Oxide Pang", in *Ghostly*

Desires: Queer Sexuality and Vernacular Buddhism in Contemporary Thai Cinema (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 87-121

- Paul Gilroy, "Jewels Brought from Bondage": Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity", in *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 72-110

Week 8 (21 Oct): History, Memory and Trauma

How do conceptions of history and time provide a means for imagining alternate futures amid an oppressive present?

Required:

- David Scott, "Futures Past", in *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 23-57

Recommended:

- Saidiya Hartman, "A Note on Method" and "An Intimate History of Slavery and Freedom," in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: Norton, 2019), pp. xiii-xv and 45-76
- Marisol de la Cadena, "Mariano's Archive: The Eventfulness of the Ahistorical," in *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 118-151

Week 9 (28 Oct): Ecology and the Non-Human

How do indigenous and vernacular beliefs about the natural and animal world offer new ideas about the relationship between humans and the environment?

Required:

- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Part I Interlude: Smelling, Chapter 11: The Life of the Forest" and "Chapter 13: Resurgence", in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 45-52, pp.155-163 and pp.179-190

Recommended:

- Brianne Cohen, "Visualising Animal Trauma and Empty Forest Syndrome in the Moving Imagery of Tuân Andrew Nguyễn", *Art Journal*, 81:4, 2022, pp. 44-61
- Cajetan Iheka, "Waste Reconsidered: Afrofuturism, Technologies of the Past, and the History of the Future," in *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), pp. 26-63

Week 10 (4 Nov): Technology and Society

How have theories of technology allowed deeper understandings of its relations, promises and anxieties with societies?

Required:

- Os Keyes, "Chapter 10: Good Technology is Vulnerable", pp. 93-99; hannah holtzclaw and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Chapter 14: Good Technology Invites Responses", pp.

125-132; Anne Anlin Cheng, "Chapter 16: Good Technology Is/Not Asian Women", pp. 145-152, in *The Good Robot : Why Technology Needs Feminism*, eds. Eleanor Drage and Kerry McInerney, 1st ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024.

Recommended:

- Shoshana Zuboff, "Chapter Five-The Elaboration of Surveillance Capitalism: Kidnap, Corner, Compete", in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019)
- Yuji Sone, "Chapter 2: Robotics and Representation", in *Japanese Robot Culture: Performance, Imagination and Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 37-60

Week 11 (11 Nov): Final paper consultation

Submission of proposal: 7 Nov, 11.59pm/2359hrs on Blackboard.

Week 12 (18 Nov): Film Screening and Discussion

- *Evil Does Not Exist* (dir. Ryusuke Hamaguchi)

Week 13 (25 Nov): Final paper presentation

Final paper submission: 5 Dec (Friday), 11.59pm/2359 hrs. Submission via Blackboard with Veriguide.

Grading Rubric:**A (Exceptional):**

The paper or project greatly exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented not only about the chosen example but also about the concepts used. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the concepts used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the concept and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organised. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

A- (Outstanding):

The paper or project exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the theory and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organised. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

B+ (Very Good):

The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is coherently organised. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

B (Good):

The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example could have been developed further. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

B- (More than Satisfactory):

The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

C+ (Satisfactory):

The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a basic understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is slightly coherent. The chosen example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

C, C- (Fair):

The paper or project barely meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used are vaguely elaborated. The paper or project fails to display a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is virtually understandable. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

D+, D (Pass):

The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. No additional insights are presented about the chosen example or the theory used on top of what was discussed in class. The language used to explain the theory and its application are almost incomprehensible. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example is irrelevant. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

F (Fail):

The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. The language and writing are poor. The chosen example is irrelevant. The theory used was not covered in class. The paper or project may have been submitted long past the deadline.