

## **CULS5226: Transnational Asian Cultural Studies**

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)

Term 2, 2025-2026

Prof. Elmo GONZAGA

Division of Cultural Studies

[egonzaga@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:egonzaga@cuhk.edu.hk)

Schedule: Wednesdays, 1:30-4:15pm

Lecture: Yasmuto International Academic Park (YIA) 502

Medium of instruction: English

TA: TBA

This course aims to trace affinities and linkages among cultural processes, geopolitical conditions, and media representations within the greater Asian region, broadly defined. Expanding its scope beyond a single nation, race, or language, the course builds on the comparativist work of Benedict Anderson, Chen Kuan-hsing, Aihwa Ong, and Anna Tsing in Asian Studies, Sinophone Studies, and Inter-Asia Cultural Studies to uncover the multiplicity of diverse Asias.

Its focal points are keywords, objects, and images that would have social resonance in particular locations and societies. Examining their global interchange through an array of print, audiovisual, and digital media, it focuses on their variance in form, use, and meaning across distinct spatial environments and historical periods with a spotlight on vernacular perspectives and experiences.

This course explores a combination of questions: How are different understandings of 'neoliberalism,' 'development,' and 'democracy' exemplified by contrasting conditions of political, social, and historical transformation? How do analogous systems of state surveillance and violence reverberate with divergent modes of trauma and justice? How are ghosts, spirits, witches, and trolls regarded in varied forms under distinct circumstances of corporate capitalism and financial speculation?

How are the racial, ethnic, or religious identities of Chinese-ness or Muslim-ness shaped by diaspora, tourism, and media? How are systems of exchange and distribution shaped by commodity circulation based on local tastes? How is the experience and consumption of nostalgia configured by particular conditions of intensifying economic and emotional instability?

How is colonialism a system that exceeds the dichotomy between East and West to encompass intraregional hierarchies centered on the economic and cultural superiority of Japan or China? How have interactions and exchanges among intellectuals, revolutionaries, and migrants constituted imaginaries of 'pan-Asianism'? With this transnational orientation, the course hopes to expand the locus of the discussion beyond Asia to encompass its trans-oceanic connections with Africa and Latin America.

## SCHEDULE

### Week 1: Transmedia Dissemination (Jan 7)

Required:

- Joshua Neves and Bhaskar Sarkar, Introduction to *Asian Video Cultures: In the Penumbra of the Global* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 1-32

Recommended:

- Adam Knee, "Thailand in the Hong Kong Cinematic Imagination," in *Hong Kong, Hollywood, and New Global Cinema*, edited by Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 77-90
- Wikanda Promkuntong, "Remnants from Distribution Channels and (Un)tenable Authorial Positions," in *Film Authorship in Contemporary Transmedia Culture: The Paratextual Lives of Asian Auteurs* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023) pp. 77-118

### Week 2: Toward Comparativism and Transnationalism (Jan 14)

Required:

- Kuan-Hsing Chen, "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:

- Tina Chen and Charlotte Eubanks, "Editors' Introduction: Acts of Suspension," in *Global Asias: Tactics and Theories* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2024), pp. 13-51
- Zhen Zhang, Sangjoon Lee, Debashree Mukherjee, and Intan Paramaditha, "Introduction: Trans-Asian Cinemas at Home in the World," in *Routledge Companion to Asian Cinemas*, eds. Zhen Zhang, Sangjoon Lee, Debashree Mukherjee, and Intan Paramaditha (New York: Routledge, 2024), pp. 1-13

### Week 3: Guest lecture (TBC) (Jan 21)

Required

- C.J. W.-L. Wee, "Introduction: A Regional Contemporary," in *A Regional Contemporary: Art Exhibitions, Pop Culture, Asia* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2025), pp. 1-25

Recommended

- "Showcasing Traditional-in-the-Contemporary and a Post-Exotic Urban Modern" and "J-Pop, K-Pop, and the Partial Negotiation of the National," in *A Regional Contemporary*, pp. 61-96 and 157-186

### Week 4: Colonialisms (Jan 28)

Required:

- Pheng Cheah, "Introduction: Situations and Limits of Postcolonial Theory," in *Siting Postcoloniality: Critical Perspectives from East Asia*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Caroline S. Hau (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), pp. 1-31

Recommended:

- Warwick Anderson, "Excremental Colonialism," in *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 104-129

- Todd A. Henry, "Material Assimilation: Colonial Expositions on the Kyongbok Palace Grounds," in *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 92-129

### **Week 5: Migration and Race (Feb 4)**

Required:

- Abdin Kusno, "Glodok on Our Minds," *The Appearances of Memory: Mnemonic Practices of Architecture and Urban Form in Indonesia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 101-124

Recommended:

- Gaik Cheng Khoo, "Reading the Films of Independent Filmmaker Yasmin Ahmad: Cosmopolitanism, Sufi Islam, and Malay Subjectivity," in *Race and Multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, eds. Daniel P.S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden, and Gaik Cheng Khoo (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 107-123
- David Teh, "Nirat: Distance, Itinerancy, and Homesickness as a Spatial Logic," in *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), pp. 81-108

### **Week 6: Genders and Sexualities (Feb 11)**

Required:

- Gayatri Gopinath, "Bollywood/Hollywood: Queer Cinematic Representation and the Perils of Translation," in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 84-130

Recommended:

- Jasmine Nadua Trice, "Gendering National Histories and Regional Imaginaries: Three Southeast Asian Women Filmmakers," *Feminist Media Histories* 5, no. 1 (2019): 11-38
- Eng-Beng Lim, "A Colonial Dyad in Balinese Performance," in *Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performance in the Asias* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), pp. 41-89

### **Week 7: LUNAR YEAR (Feb 18)**

### **Week 8: Nature and Environment (Feb 25)**

Required:

- Anna Tsing, "Arts of Noticing," "Contamination as Collaboration," and "Some Problems with Scale," in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 17-43

Recommended:

- Juno Salazar Parreñas, "The Materiality of Intimacy in Wildlife Rehabilitation: Rethinking Ethical Capitalism through Embodied Encounters with Animals in Southeast Asia," *positions: asia critique* 24, no. 1 (2016): 97-127
- Joanne Leow, "Reading New Asian Tropicalities in Contemporary Singapore," *positions: asia critique* 28, no. 4 (2020): 869-904

### **Week 9: Indigeneities and Spiritualities (Mar 4)**

Required:

- Yuriko Furuhashi, "Archipelagic Archives: Media Geology and the Deep Time of Japan's Settler Colonialism," *Public Culture* 33, no. 3 (2021): 417-440

Recommended:

- Andrew Alan Johnson, "River Beings," in *Mekong Dreaming: Life and Death along a Changing River* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), pp. 69-103
- Sophie Chao, "Eaten by Palm Oil," in *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), pp. 183-200

### **Week 10: Film screening (Mar 11)**

### **Week 11: Field trip (Mar 18)**

### **Submission of abstract for final project (Mar 18)**

### **Week 12: Consultations on final project (Mar 25)**

### **Week 13: Submission of critical reflection (Apr 1)**

### **Week 14: Presentations on final project (Apr 8)**

### **Week 15: Submission of final project (Apr 18)**

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- 1) To become acquainted with the key issues and debates in comparative and transnational Asian cultural and media studies
- 2) To identify points of similarity, affinity, and variance in the diverse histories and cultures of the greater Asian region
- 3) To apply a comparative, transnational lens to uncover and analyze cross-cultural connections and divergences among seemingly disparate spatial environments, media ecologies, and historical milieus

### **ASSESSMENT**

#### **Class Participation – 15%**

Please make sure you have thoroughly read the required readings. You are expected to participate actively during lectures, presentations, and discussions by posing relevant questions and insights. In every class session, different students will be called on to share their thoughts or questions. Your responses to your classmates will also be assessed.

#### **Group-led Discussion of Recommended Reading (30 mins.) – 20%**

In each session beginning the end of the add-drop period, groups of students will be assigned to lead the discussion of the recommended readings. For your presentation, your group should: 1) present a summary of your recommended readings' key terms, concepts, and arguments pertaining to the themes in the session's title. Your discussion should also 2) explain how these ideas might be applicable to other cultural and intercultural examples not

mentioned in the assigned readings for that session. Questions will be asked during and after your discussion to clarify and test your understanding of your assigned reading.

This requirement will be marked based on the depth and clarity of your understanding of the assigned readings, which the members of your group will demonstrate during the presentation. The organization and coherence of the presentation will be taken as evidence of your group's effort and preparedness. Part of your grade will also come from the quality, suitability, and uniqueness of your examples.

By 11am on your presentation day, you should email to the instructor and TA a copy of your 1) group slideshow and 2) individual presenter notes to facilitate grading.

### **Multimodal critical reflection (400-600 words + 2 images) – 20%**

Each student will write a critical reflection which analyzes one work from during the field trip that highlights an inter-Asian connection, interaction, or tension. This multimodal paper will combine written text with self-produced photos.

Choose one important concept about transnational Asian culture discussed in class. You will take 2 photos of different sights, images, or spaces during the field trip that would illustrate or extend this concept. The accompanying written text of 400-600 words should provide 1) a clear and concise definition of the concept, and 2) an insightful and coherent analysis of how these 2 photos would illustrate or extend the concept.

This requirement will be marked based on the depth, originality, clarity of the understanding it demonstrates in its explanation of its ideas and their application. The suitability of the key idea from the assigned readings for the selected image of inter-Asian connection or interaction will factor into the grade.

### **Group project (9 images) + paper (2000-3000 words) – 40%**

#### **Group presentation of final project (10 mins.) – 5%**

As your final requirement for the course, you will work in groups to produce a visual archive of 9 images using Padlet that explores how a keyword, object, or image is articulated or understood across 3 different Asian contexts. This visual archive will be accompanied by a written paper that analyzes the similarities, connections, or divergences across these contexts.

This requirement will be marked based on the depth, originality, and clarity of the understanding it demonstrates in its explanation of its ideas and their substantiation. The suitability and uniqueness of the chosen ideas and images will factor into the grade. Additional credit will be given to the quality and professionalism in the production of the visual archive. Lastly, the presentation of the project will be marked for its organization and coherence.

Each group will submit a summary of the proposed project of 400-500 words in bullet-point format, which concisely describes its plans for the project and the ideas to be applied. Based on this proposal, the instructor will help you develop your project during a one-on-one consultation.

During our final meeting, your group will present to the rest of the class a summary of your project, which will be your last opportunity to receive feedback before submitting the final version.

## **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 organized. 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 organized. 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 organized. 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.

## **ACADEMIC ETHICS**

You are expected to abide by the university's principles and regulations on academic honesty. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with the information on the following webpage:

<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

Violations such as plagiarized 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.

By submitting your papers for assessment, you are acknowledging that ChatGPT or a similar AI platform was not used in any way in the production of this written assignment.

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