The Chinese University of Hong Kong
MA in Cultural Management
Term 2, 2025-2026
CULS5301 Concepts of Contemporary Culture
(tentative)

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Course Description

This course investigates the intricate dynamics of culture and its profound impact on our daily lives. It aims to answer pivotal questions such as: How does culture shape our everyday existence? In a world where the cultural milieu is constantly changing, how should we comprehend, scrutinize, and reflect upon contemporary culture? All these questions lead us back to the core: What are we truly managing and mediating when we talk about cultural management and performing the role of a cultural mediator?

We approach these questions by learning key theories and methodologies from cultural studies. Especially those related to the power dynamics in the production and consumption of cultures, the representation politics in different art forms, and the cultural politics of everyday life. By the end of this course, students will have gained a comprehensive understanding of contemporary cultures within the Asian context. This course also equips them with the necessary tools to critically engage with cultural practices.

Learning outcomes

- **Recognize and develop** a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics of culture and its impact on the contemporary world.
- **Acquire and list** necessary tools and methodologies in cultural studies to engage with cultural practices critically, enabling students to navigate and manage the complexities of culture.
- **Analyze and evaluate** the politics and ideological implications of different forms of cultural productions contextually.
- **Theorize** how cultural politics permeate various facets of daily life, offering insights into how culture influences perceptions and actions, and empowering students to engage with critical thoughts.
- **Reflect and create** their cultural practices through the lens of critical theories.

Class Activities
- Lectures and interactive tutorials
- Guest lecture and sharing
- Field trips

Assessment methods

Class participation (10%) –attendance and in-class contribution

Course works (30%)

- Attending **Three discussion panels** with constructive inputs:
    - 1st Show & Tell and responses (10%)
    - 2nd Interpretation exercise and mind map (10%)
    - 3rd Peer seminar on final project (10%)

Reflections (20%)

Students are required to write **a reflection**. It should be no more than 1200 words, double-spaced, in English, and should focus on **ONE** media artifact or product, exhibition(s), or specific artist's work that related to course contents.

Group project (40%)

Task	Percentage
Progress Report	5%
Oral presentation	15%
Curatorial plans	20%

Choose **no more than 10 cultural artifacts** and plan a knowledge transfer proposal to re-work the archive materials. The project should have concrete research question and criticality to contemporary cultures.

Each group needs to conduct an oral presentation of 25 minutes to present their curation thoughts. Detailed guidelines will be announced in class. A group's curatorial plans should be submitted along with presentation PowerPoint.

Textbook:

1. Barker, C. and Jane, E. A. (2016). *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (fifth edition). Washington, D.C.: SAGE Publications Ltd.
2. Chen, K.-H., & Chua, B.H. (2007). *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader* (1st ed.). Routledge.
3. Hall, G. and Birchall, C. (2022). *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*. Edinburgh University Press.
4. Oswell, David. *Culture and Society: An Introduction to Cultural Studies*. SAGE, 2006.

Contents

Lesson 1 Introduction – Why culture matters?

Key Questions: Why culture matters? How does the globalization and translational cultural exchange shape our cultures? How do we situate ourselves in this era that full of crisis? This week, we will examine the concept of 'culture' and its connection to our daily lives.

Keywords: culture is ordinary, the politics of everyday life, popular cultures

Readings:

- Chris Barker & Emma A. Jane (2016) 'The Parameters of Cultural Studies,' *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Sage, pp.6–9; 'Key Concepts in Cultural Studies,' pp.9–14; "Questions of methodology," pp. 35–43.
- Williams, R. (1989) "Culture is Ordinary [1958]." *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*. London: Verso, pp. 3-14.

Lesson 2 Interpretation matters (1): Text and representation politics

Key Questions: How are power dynamics manifested and perpetuated through the processes of representation in cultural artifacts, media, and communication? In what ways do representations influence and shape societal perceptions, values, and ideologies?

Keywords: Representation politics; Coding/decoding; Spectacle; Spectatorship; Visual Culture, Mass Culture.

Readings:

- Stuart Hall. (1997). "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage. pp. 15–64.
- Caroline Bassett. (2006) "Cultural Studies and New Media," in Gary Hall & Clare Birchall ed., *New Culture Studies: Adventures in Theory*. Edinburgh University Press. pp. 220–237.
- Nightingale, Virginia. (1996). "An audience perspective and media criticism," *Studying Audiences: The Shock of the Real*. London: Routledge. pp. 1–22.

Lesson 3 Interpretation matters (2): Cultures in Context

Key Questions: Following our learning last week: representation matters as it is a system that encoded meanings of societal perceptions, values, and ideologies. This week, we continue to ask why and how representation relates to socio-political contexts.

Keywords: ideology, discourse, power/knowledge, intersectionality

Readings:

- Stuart Hall. (1997). "The Spectacle of Other," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying,* 223–290.
- Collins, P. H. (2019) "Intersectionality as critical inquiry," In *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. (2013) "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In Chrisman, L. and Williams P. ed., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Oxon: Routledge. pp. 66–111.

Lesson 4 Show and Tell Workshop (10%)

Each of you will perform two roles in class, the presenter and the listener.

As a presenter, working alone and bringing to class something that has a strong connection to your daily life and gives your reflection on it.

You will have 5-8 min to: show a clip or some images, take us through a website, read several passages out loud, play some music for us, share pamphlets for us to look at, bring in a queer object, etc. Any media, any format – although it is your responsibility to make sure we are set up for whatever it is you want to do.

As a listener, take notes on your peer's show & tell and engage your self-reflections. In this exercise, we learn to engage ourselves in our cultural context and practices, and we learn to reflect on our position and bias by listening to others.

Lesson 5 The Location of Culture: Trans-Asia as method

Key Questions: Located in Asia, how can we explore cultures beyond Western epistemology? For decades, intellectuals and cultural practitioners have been examining the potential of an integrated Asia as a method for cultural practices. This week, we reflect on Western epistemology and closely examine trans-Asian cultural exchanges and their significance.

Keywords: globalization, transnationality, decolonization, Asia as method, trans-Asia cultural exchange, identities, race.

Readings:

- Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1996, 25-46.
- Chen, K.-H., & Chua, B.H. (2007). 'Introduction,' *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader* (1st ed.). Routledge. pp.1–5.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2020). "Trans-Asia as Method: A Collaborative and Dialogic Project in a Globalized World," in J. de Kloet, Y. F. Chow, & G. P. L. Chong, Eds. *Trans-Asia as Method: Theory and Practices*. Rowman & Littlefield International. Pp. 25-42.

Lesson 6 Rethinking Culture (1): digital spaces, media, and screen

Key Questions: How do media technologies advancements and information culture shape and influence cultural practices, identities, and interactions in contemporary society? Drilling from the concept of convergence culture, we will delve into and reflect on contemporary digital landscape.

Keywords: digital media, cyberspace, information culture, screen culture

Readings:

- Jenkins, H. (2008). *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide.* New York: New York University Press. (Chapters 1, pp. 25-58; Chapter 3 & 4 pp.93-168)
- Caroline Bassett, "Cultural Studies and New Media," in Gary Hall & Clare Birchall ed., *New Culture Studies: Adventures in Theory*. Edinburgh University Press. 2006. pp. 220–237.

Lesson 7 Rethinking Culture (2): gender, sexuality, and body

Key Questions: How do the concepts of patriarchy and intersectionality inform our understanding of gender and sexuality in contemporary cultures, and how does the concept of 'trans-ness' challenge traditional narratives surrounding identity and body?

Keywords: performativity, embodiment, patriarchy, transgender, queering

Readings:

- bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin: As a Space of Radical Openness," in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics (South End Press, 1990), 145–153.
- Johnson, Allan. "Patriarchy, the System: An It, not a He, a Them or an Us." In *The Gender Knot: Unraveling our Patriarchal Legacy*, 26-47. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014.
- Leslie Feinberg (2013). "Transgender Liberation A Movement Whose Time Has Come" in Whittle, Stephen, and Susan Stryker, ed., *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Taylor and Francis. pp 205-220.

Lesson 8 Rethinking Culture (3): posthuman, animal, ecology

Key Questions: In what ways do the concepts of cyborg and the blurring of boundaries between human and non-human challenge traditional notions of identity and nature? Thinking beyond human-centered mindset, how does ecocriticism further complicate our understanding of the contemporary cultures?

Keywords: cybernetics, posthuman, cyborg, animality, ecocriticism

Readings:

- Donna Haraway (1991) "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist, Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York; Routledge. pp.149-181.

- Craig, L. (2014). "Thinking Flowers? as black eco-feminist activism." *Feminist Review*, *108*, 71–80.

Field trips week – details will be discussed during class

Lesson 9 Discussion - Interpretation exercise and mind map (10%)

In this lesson, the classroom will function as a discussion forum. Each group will present one to two pieces they found during their field trip to the class. Tutors will assign your work to a random group. We will conduct an interpretation exercise to decode the work and share mind maps.

Lesson 10 Bridging Cultures (1): Power, governance, and institution

Key Questions: Government did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather it designed the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed. In this sense, government is related to forms of power– a set of practices and actions of oneself and others. This week, we return to the discussion on power/knowledge but zoom in the governance of individuals.

Keywords: apparatus, governmentality

Readings:

- Oswell, D. (2006). "Power: From ideology to Government," *Culture and society: An introduction to cultural studies*. SAGE Publications. pp.41-73.

Lesson 11 Bridging Cultures (2): Popular culture, public culture, and community

Key Questions: Popular culture remains a crucial aspect of cultural studies. It serves as an object of analysis in scholarly discussions to understand the trends of various cultures in the public arena. Fundamentally, what does "public" mean? What significance does culture hold in the context of the public sphere?

Keywords: popular culture, digital literacy, public culture, community

Readings:

- McGuigan, Jim. (1996) "Culture and the Public Sphere." *Culture and the Public Sphere*, Routledge, pp. 176–90.
- Morimotom, Lori Hitchcock and Bertha Chin. "Reimagining the Imagined Community: Online Media Fandoms in the Age of Global Convergence." In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, 174-188, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2017.

Lesson 12 Bridging Cultures (3): Cultural Mediator and its discontent

Key Questions: Translators and interpreters are believed to be the predecessors of cultural mediation. They have historically bridged and facilitated communication

between cultures. However, as we have learned in previous weeks, there is always an uneven distribution of power among cultures. What roles do they play as cultural mediators, and why and how do they perform these roles? This week, we will delve deeper into the role of cultural mediators to conclude our course learning.

Keywords: discursive practices, interpretation, cultural mediator

Readings:

- Bochner, S. (1981). "The Role and Personality of the Mediator," *The Mediating person : bridges between cultures*. G.K. Hall.

Lesson 13 - 14– Group project presentations (40%) and peer seminars (10%)

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to university policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

- In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.

- For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment.

- Students are fully aware that their work may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.

- Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgment and citations as suggested by the course teacher.

Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.

Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

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<u>All use of AI tools is prohibited in assignments and assessment tasks</u>

For assignments and assessment tasks that count towards the final course grades, students are not allowed to submit work which is produced with the collaboration of or supported by the use of any generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT)*.

Any breach of the regulations will be considered an act of academic dishonesty and will be handled according to the University's *Procedures for Handling Cases of Academic Dishonesty.*

In case of queries, students should seek advice from the course teacher.