

HL 2012
Asian American Literature
AY 2024/25 S2



Instructor: Dr Samuel Wee (samuelwee@ntu.edu.sg)

Seminars are on Mondays (1330 - 1620) at LHS-TR+51.

Office hours on Wednesdays 1330- 1530, either in-person at SHHK Building #03-79, or by appointment over Zoom.

Tentative syllabus is subject to change.

Overview

This course introduces students to a variety of texts and cultural productions in the Asian American tradition, both canonical and contemporary, across a range of genres and media. We will examine the emergence, codification, and subsequent complication of “Asian American” as a positionality set within the larger histories of North American settler colonialism and Asian migration. Specifically, we will explore how Asia as a region is represented within the American imaginary, both from an imperial Eurocentric perspective, as well as from the Asian American diasporic lens. In attending to these tropes of representation, we will come to examine our own subject positions as citizens or residents of Singapore in postcolonial Asia, and ask what kinds of dialogue are possible between Asian America and Asia.

COURSE READINGS

(Books, to be purchased or taken out from the library)

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*
Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Exileé* and *Tempo Morts*
Divya Victor, *Curb*
Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*
David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*
Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*

(Films to be watched on DVD or via online streaming services)

Crazy Rich Asians (dir. Jon M. Chu)
Past Lives (dir. Celine Song)

COURSE POLICIES AND STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

- (1) **In general**, do your best to complete the assigned pre-class readings and activities, attend all seminar classes punctually, and take all scheduled assignments and tests by due dates. Though the reading schedule may look intimidating at first glance, with the exception of the two novels, most of our texts are poems, graphic novels, and films that are easily finished within one or two train commutes!
- (2) **Secondary readings**: This is a level 4 module, so theory constitutes a huge part of the course. While keeping up with the readings might seem intimidating or stressful, the course is structured such that every week, I will begin with a brief lecture covering both the assigned readings. A useful approach towards reading a large amount of theory and criticism is to practice **reading for ideas instead of details** (which I will cover in the first week of class). On top of that, we will also think through the material via the weekly presentations that your classmates give. Because you will be expected to give at least **two (2)** presentations in this class (once before, and once after the break), one good way to approach this is to see it as asking you to take ownership of **two weeks** for the semester in which you will chip in to help your fellow classmates understand and unpack the material.
- (3) **Participation**: The format of this class is known as a *flipped classroom*, where learning is heavily peer-driven. As such, I expect all students to make a reasonable effort to participate in seminar discussions and activities. The subject matter of this class is challenging, so I encourage you to make the most of the smaller collaboration groups by candidly voicing any difficulties you might face with understanding the readings, testing out potential arguments, and learning to support and be supported by your peers. In other words, doing well in this course is not simply a matter of demonstrating your own individual intelligence, but also consistently contributing to a productive and nourishing learning environment. Disruptive behavior will be firmly called out. If you find yourself struggling with the course at any point, please take the initiative to approach me to schedule a consultation within my office hours.
- (4) **Course content**: Some materials in this course contain sensitive content, including violence, sexual assault, and wartime trauma (*The Sympathizer*, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*), self-harm and gendered violence (*The Woman Warrior*), depictions of offensive racial stereotypes (*American Born Chinese*), and racialised violence (*Curb*). If you anticipate, based on the description of the content, that it might be distressing to you, please notify me. If you encounter content during readings or discussions that is overwhelming, I encourage you to pause and let me know. There may also be occasions when your own work touches on potentially upsetting content. In this case, please give a content warning before you share your work.
- (5) **Absence** from class without a valid reason will not only affect your overall course grade, but also your holistic understanding of the subject matter. NTU's policy for valid absences include falling sick and participation in NTU's approved activities supported by an excuse letter from the relevant bodies. I treat punctuality seriously as well – coming on time is not simply a matter of discipline, but respecting your fellow students and their learning experience. If there are intervening factors keeping you from the seminar, please let me know prior to the start of class.
- (6) **Deadlines** assigned in this class are to be adhered to, ***especially for group presentations!*** For the essays, I will be implementing an extension policy which I will explain on the first day of class.
- (7) **Plagiarism** is dumb as hell. Don't do it.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS

Participation, 10%: The format of this class is heavily peer-driven. As such, the participation grade is meant to encourage and evaluate your investment in the class. You are expected to complete the readings and come to class ready to discuss them. In addition to the two presentations (detailed below), you will also be evaluated on how much you contribute to the overall learning environment of the class.

If you are more comfortable with ways of thinking, learning, and helping your classmates outside of the vocal seminar format, I also encourage you to demonstrate your engagement with the text other ways, such as one-on-one conversations during my office hours, emailing me your brief thoughts about the reading for the week, or compiling cheat sheets for your classmates. (*ongoing*)

Presentations, 15%: This class uses a flipped classroom model where students drive the learning process through small collaboration groups. On day one, we'll form groups that remain constant for five weeks before reshuffling. Starting in week 2, each group will give a **15-20** minute presentation (with timekeeping as a graded component). Your job is not to impress me, but to help everyone learn as "first learners" that engage with primary and secondary readings—this might take the form of summarising the material, critiquing it, or even candidly voicing difficulties or struggles you might have with understanding the text.

At the end of each presentation, groups will create four discussion questions for the class. In the second half of the seminar, the presenting group will split up and help guide discussions within the other four groups, with each group tackling a different discussion question. Note: while the presentations are group efforts, grades will be assigned individually based on my evaluation. (*Ongoing, weekly*)

Research Essay, 30%: You will be asked to formulate an original reading of our course texts that takes into account the themes of the class. This assignment tests your ability to critically analyse the texts and perform original close readings, as well as your ability to integrate scholarship from academic sources into your argument. You will also be evaluated on your overall ability to structure a persuasive argument. (*Due Week 10, March 27*)

Group Reflections, 15%: In your collaboration group, you will be asked to collectively carry out and present an exercise where you will reflect critically upon how the readings we have done relate to your personal lives as situated in Singapore, and how they have impacted your understanding of your own positionality. The format of this exercise will be specified later in the semester, and creative interpretations are encouraged. Keep in mind that to do well on the team assessments, it is necessary for you to demonstrate positive interdependence and teamwork. In principle, you will receive the same marks as your team. However, your individual score may vary based on feedback about your contributions to the group work. (*Due Week 13, April 14*)

Final Exam, 30%: You will pick from several questions given to you two prompts to respond to, and write two short essay responses that demonstrates your knowledge of the course material and your mastery of its critical concepts. The exam is intended to evaluate the degree to which you have internalized the teachings of this class and synthesise it with your ongoing knowledge of literature. (*April 28*)

POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Good academic work depends on honesty and ethical behaviour. As a student, it is important that you recognize your responsibilities in understanding and applying the principles of academic integrity in all the work you do at NTU. *Not knowing what is involved in maintaining academic integrity does not excuse academic dishonesty.* You need to actively equip yourself with strategies to avoid all forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, self-plagiarism, academic fraud, collusion and cheating. If you are uncertain of the definitions of any of these terms, you should go to the academic integrity website for more information.

Consult me or your tutors if you need any clarification about the requirements of academic integrity in the course.

On the use of AI tools, here are some guidelines on the use of AI tools for coursework:

1. Do **not** pass off writing from AI as your own. At the university level, the ability to resourcefully consult and connect your writing to other vetted sources is just as important as your ability to generate original ideas. Passing off AI text as your own is not only easily detectable to a trained reader, it also undermines the entire basis of a humanities education.
2. If you are to use any AI tool, ensure that such usage is properly cited. Extending the practice of correctly citing references in your work under NTU's policies on citation and plagiarism, the University requires students to (i) identify any generative AI tools used and (ii) declare how the tools are used in submitted work.

For HL2012, if the assignment explicitly allows for generative AI to be used, you should provide in your submission **clear and complete screenshots** of your conversation with the generative AI tool. These screenshots should include all student-generated text that were fed into the AI as a prompt, well as all responses generated by the AI tool. Failure to pre-emptively identify and declare your use of AI will be treated as academic dishonesty, and you will be disciplined accordingly.

NOTE: even with acknowledgement, copying of output generated by AI tools (in part or whole) may still be regarded as plagiarism (refer to below). If in the doubt, err on the side of caution and talk to me.

3. For assignments that exclude the use of generative AI, **your essay should be written entirely on Google Docs** before being downloaded and submitted through NTULearn as a .docx file. You are to retain your original Google Docs file for the duration of the semester, and to grant your instructors access to the file whenever it becomes necessary to inspect the file's version history.
4. Before submitting a piece of work in which generative AI has been used, make sure to check and recheck your facts, quotes, and sources! Most generative AI tools do not give you actual information; instead, they provide natural sounding language. In other words, they excel at writing nonsense that sounds plausible. If you consult AI at any point, be sure to not only properly cite it, but also to check that the texts it quotes actually exist.
5. Finally, nothing beats your own ideas. AI tools may be good at producing summaries and grammatical sentences, but they cannot replace your original ideas and creativity. A rigorous education will equip you with the ability to express your ideas, process ideas for problem solving and make sound judgements. These capabilities and your unique human experiences are still your most valuable assets.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

| Week | Topic | Readings/ Activities |
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| Week 1 (Jan 13) | Introduction: What is Asian American Literature? | <i>Administrative</i> // Students form collaboration groups In-class analysis: Mitski, "Strawberry Blond", "Your Best American Girl" |
| Week 2 (Jan 20) | America in Asia | Ocean Vuong, selected poems from <i>Night Sky With Exit Wounds</i> (Content warning: domestic violence and wartime trauma) |
| Week 3 (Jan 27) | America in Asia (cont'd) | Viet Thanh Nguyen, <i>The Sympathizer</i> (HBL week) (Content warning: violence, sexual assault, and wartime trauma) |
| Week 4 (February 3) | America in Asia (cont'd) | Viet Thanh Nguyen, <i>The Sympathizer</i> |
| Week 5 (February 10) | Imagining Asia | Maxine Hong Kingston, <i>The Woman Warrior</i> Content warning: (Self-harm and familial violence) |
| Week 6 (February 17) | Imagining Asia (cont'd) | End of first collaboration group cycle Maxine Hong Kingston, <i>The Woman Warrior</i> (cont'd) Edward Said, excerpts from <i>Orientalism</i> Group reflection assignment briefing |
| Week 7 (February 24) | Imagining Asia (cont'd) | New collaboration group cycle Gene Luen Yang, <i>American Born Chinese</i> (Content warning: offensive racial stereotypes) |
| Recess Week (March 3) | | |
| Week 8 (March 10) | Queering Asian America | David Henry Hwang, <i>M. Butterfly</i> |
| Week 9 (March 17) | Mediating Asian America | Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, "audience distant relative", "Exilee", "Temps Morts", from <i>Exilee and Temps Morts</i> (printed book), and "Clio" from <i>Dictee</i> (to be uploaded as PDF) |
| Week 10 (March 24) | Mediating Asian America | Divya Victor, <i>Curb</i> (Content warning: racialised violence) |
| Week 11 (March 31) | Hari Raya Puasa | N/A |
| Week 12 (April 7) | Asia in America | <i>Past Lives</i> (dir. Celine Song) |

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| Week 13 (April 14) | Asia in America | <i>Crazy Rich Asians</i> (dir. Jon M. Chu) Asynchronous online learning week Group reflections activity due Exam briefing | |
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