

HUMA 5451/HUMA40000

IMAGES OF ASIA

Fall 2026

Wednesdays, 12:00 – 2:50 pm

Rm 4620, Lift 31-32

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Baryon Tensor Posadas

Academic Building Room 2355

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course takes up the visual and textual practices through which an imagined “Asia” has been constructed across history as a point of departure for interrogating the premises and practices of cross-cultural analysis more broadly. In examining non-Asian texts’ representations of Asia, the challenge in this course is not simply to determine the accuracy or authenticity of the various texts’ respective representations, but to ask what is at stake in the deployment of “Asia” as an imagined geography. With these discussions as our point of departure, we will consider the critical and theoretical issues foregrounded by acts of looking, writing, and interpreting “Asia” to reflect on our own intellectual positions vis-a-vis acts of representing “the foreign.”

Particular emphasis will be placed on such focal points as: ethnographic cinema, the politics of travel and translation, the intersecting performances of race and gender, the uses of cultural otherness in the writing of alternate histories, and the ramifications of techno-orientalist discourse. We will consider such questions as: How do the texts in question call attention the political-economic conditions that have shaped representations of Asia at given historical conjunctures? How does the problem of gender and its intersections with discourses on race, ethnicity, or the nation complicate how we might apprehend the mechanisms through which “Asia” is imagined in film and fiction? How might we account for the possibility of auto-orientalisms in inter-Asian cultural productions?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Articulate key issues in cross-cultural analysis vis-à-vis Asia and beyond.
- Produce textual analyses of films and fictions with particular attention to how texts’ formal devices, narrative strategies, and patterns of focalization mediate their practices of cross-cultural representation.
- Identify broader patterns of representation in works of film and fiction that take up an imagined “Asia” as their object of interest.
- Produce their own written critiques of texts that engage in cross-cultural representation.
- Familiarize themselves with professional academic practices for communicating their work orally to an audience.

COURSE EVALUATION

Attendance and participation	20%
Individual Presentation	15%
Peer Review	15%

Midterm exam	25%
Final paper or Final Exam	25%

Attendance and Participation

Attendance to class sessions and active participation in the discussions are mandatory. Please come to class having already watched the films and read the critical materials assigned for that session and be prepared to critically discuss them in class.

Individual Presentations

From week 3 onwards, up to two student will be assigned lead the discussion by first briefly (maximum 30 minutes) presenting their review of one of the assigned readings and bringing it into conversation with the film to be discussed for the session. These presentations will serve to open the conversation in class by raising further questions and points of discussion. During the first three weeks of class, students are asked to sign up on Canvas for the session they wish to lead. Students may sign up for any session of their choosing, with every student leading the discussion once during the semester.

Session Review

In addition to one's own individual presentation, students are also required to submit one 1-2 page (single-spaced) review of a presentation other than your own. In these reviews, students will provide a brief summary of the key points raised in the presentation and subsequent discussion, followed by further commentary and an articulation of their own perspectives on the topics at hand. As with the critical reflections above, these reviews should go beyond mere summaries to instead build upon the preceding discussions by raising further questions and inquiries or by highlighting relevant related critical issues. Students are free to choose which presentation they wish to write their review on.

Midterm Exam

For the midterm exam on Week 8, students will be asked to engage with key issues raised in the class up to that point by making use of the assigned readings taken up during the discussions from the preceding weeks. The midterm exam will be an in-class essay, and will ask students to articulate the stakes and significance of the most pressing problems at stake in taking up "Asia" as an object of study and articulate a position for yourself vis-a-vis these issues.

(Oct 21)

Final Exam/Paper

For UG students enrolled in HUMA40000, a final exam will be held during the university exam period. Similar to the midterm exam, the format of the final exam will be an in-class essay. Students will be asked to select one question among a range of possible topics taking up critical issues in relation to the course material. Possible topics include questions of diasporic Asian cinema, Hong Kong identity in the transnational context, techno-orientalism, among other possibilities.

For PG students enrolled in HUMA 5451, a final paper is required. Using one filmic text as a focal point, produce an analysis of the range critical issues in relation to the ways in which "Asia" is represented in cinema. Topics can include (but are not restricted to) any of the themes discussed in class, e.g., travelogues and ethnographies, intersections of gender, and nation, ethnic and gender passing, techno-orientalisms and empire, etc. Papers should be organized around a text (literary, filmic, etc.) not previously discussed in the class. While students are expected to make use of the relevant theoretical and critical materials covered in class, the specific focus of the paper and choice of text is for the student to determine in consultation with the instructor.

(Final papers due Dec 14; Final exam date: TBA)

Late final papers will be subject to a 2% penalty per day.

REQUIRED TEXTS

FILMS

Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*, 1983
Rob Marshall, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, 2005
Peter Greenaway, *The Pillow Book*, 1995
David Cronenberg, *M. Butterfly*, 1993
Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959
David Semel, *The Man in a High Castle*, episode 1, 2015
Lulu Wang, *The Farewell*, 2019
Davy Chou, *Return to Seoul*, 2022
Lana and Lily Wachowski, *Cloud Atlas*, 2012
Olivier Assayas, *Boarding Gate*, 2007
Wong Kar Wai, *2046*, 2004

All other materials listed below will be made available through the course website

SCHEDULE

Week 1 Historical Signposts: *Orientalism* and Area Studies

Sep 2 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 1-27

Harootunian, Harry D. "Postcoloniality's Unconscious/Area Studies' Desire." In *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*, edited by Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian. Duke University Press, 2002.

Walker, Gavin, and Naoki Sakai. "The End of Area." *Positions: Asia Critique* 27, no. 1 (2019): 1-31.

Week 2 Ethnographic Cinema

Sep 9 Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*

Dean McCannell, "Staged Authenticity," *The Tourist: A New Theory on the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 91-108.

Alexander, Travis. "A Hint of Industrial Espionage in the Eye: Orientalism, Essayism, and the Politics of Memory in Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 36, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 42-61.

Week 3 Authenticity and Spectacle

Sep 16 Rob Marshall, *Memoirs of a Geisha*.

Anne Allison, "Memoirs of the Orient." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 27.2 (2001): 381-398.

Lau, Dorothy W. S. "On (Not) Speaking English: The 'Phonic' Personae of Transnational Chinese Stars in the Global Visual Network." *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 12, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 20-40.

Week 4 Textuality and Visuality

Sep 23 Peter Greenaway, *The Pillow Book*

Sisley, Joy. "Writing, the Body, and Cinema: Peter Greenaway's *The Pillow Book*." Punzi, Maddalena Pennacchia, ed. *Literary Intermediality: The Transit of Literature Through the Media Circuit*. Peter Lang, 2007.

Ch'ien, Evelyn Nien-Ming. "Civilized, Globalized, or Nationalized?: Peter Greenaway's *Pillowbook* and Postcolonial Calligraphy." In *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures*. Routledge, 2013.

Week 5 Sexuality and Nationality

Sep 30 David Cronenberg, *M. Butterfly*

Dorinne Kondo, "*M. Butterfly*: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Critique of Essentialist Identity" in *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (Routledge, 1997), pp. 31-54.

Yeh, Catherine Vance. "Politics, Art, and Eroticism: The Female Impersonator as the National Cultural Symbol of Republican China." In *Performing "Nation,"* 205-39. Brill, 2008.

Week 6 War, Representation, Desire

Oct 7 Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

Maclear, Kyo. "The Limits of Vision: *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and the Subversion of Representation." Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler, eds. *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*. Psychology Press, 2003.

Earl Jackson, Jr. "Desire at Cross(-Cultural) Purposes: *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 2.1 (1994): 133-174.

Week 7 "Asia" in Alternate Histories

Oct 14 David Semel, *The Man in a High Castle*, episode 1

Cassie Carter, "The Metacolonization of Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*: Mimicry, Parasitism, and Americanism in the PSA," *Science Fiction Studies* 22.3 (Nov 1995): 333-342.

Powell, Zachary Michael. "The Ethics of Alternate History: Melodrama and Political Engagement in Amazon's *The Man in the High Castle*." *South Atlantic Review* 83, no. 3 (2018): 150–69.

Week 8 Midterm

Oct 21 Midterm exam

Week 9 Sino-American cinema

Oct 28 Lulu Wang, *The Farewell*

Fong, Benjamin Ruilin. "Learning to Speak Chinese: Defining the Sino-American Film Paradigm." *Arts* 13, no. 1 (2024): 18.

Marchetti, Gina. "Conclusion: The View from the Chinese Diaspora in *The Farewell* (2019)." In *Women Filmmakers and the Visual Politics of Transnational China in the #MeToo Era*. Routledge, 2024.

Week 10 Diasporic Returns

Nov 4 Davy Chou, *Return to Seoul*

Park, So Young. "Transnational Adoption, 'Hallyu', and the Politics of Korean Popular Culture." *Biography* 33, no. 1 (2010): 151–66.

King, Homa. "Forever Opaque: Glissant, Laplanche, and Return to Seoul." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 40, no. 3 (120) (2025): 107–32.

Week 11 Techno-orientalism

Nov 11 Lana and Lily Wachowski, *Cloud Atlas*

Roh, David S., Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu. "Technologizing Orientalism: An Introduction." In *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, 1–19. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015.

Shin, Haerin. "Engineering the Techno-Orient: The Hyperrealization of Post-Racial Politics in *Cloud Atlas*." In *Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction*. University Press of Mississippi, 2017.

Week 12 Global Infrastructures of Race

Nov 18 Olivier Assayas, *Boarding Gate*

Steven, Shaviro. *Post Cinematic Affect*. Zer0 Books, 2010. Pp.46-78.

Ma, Chun-Lung. "Traversing Hong Kong's Non-Places and Heterotopias in Films of Global Crises." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 50, no. 3 (2023): 364–85.

Week 13 Transnational Asia

Nov 25 Wong Kar Wai, *2046*

Overbeeke, Bram. "A Palimpsest of Hong Kong Futures Across Three Fictions (1962–2046)." *Journal of Chinese Film Studies* 4, no. 2 (2024): 325–48.

Lo, Kwai-Cheung. "There Is No Such Thing as Asia: Racial Particularities in the 'Asian' Films of Hong Kong and Japan." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 17, no. 1 (2005): 133–58.

COURSE POLICIES

Statement on Assessment and Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing, and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Numeric percentile grades will be converted to letter grades using the following standard:

A+	97-100	Excellent Performance
A	93-96	
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good Performance
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Satisfactory Performance
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D	60-69	Marginal Pass
F	0-59	Fail

Academic Integrity

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology is a community designed for scholarship - for teaching, learning, and research. Academic integrity and honesty are critical values in upholding HKUST's reputation as a community of scholars and its claim to the "intellectual property" created by staff and students. All students who join HKUST are therefore committed to an [Academic Honor Code](#).

Course AI Policy

The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in any aspect of this course.

Communication and Feedback

Under normal circumstances, assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Students who have further questions about the feedback (including marks) should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

Special Educational Needs

The University takes a proactive role in ensuring and cultivating a positive learning environment for students, where equal opportunities in academic and non-academic pursuits for each student are guaranteed.

The SEN Support under the Counseling and Wellness Center provides a wide range of support services and resources to ensure that all students have equality of opportunity, that they benefit equally from university life, and to cultivate a campus culture of inclusion.

If a student is diagnosed or suspects his/her difficulties are related to any type of SEN, he or she is strongly advised to self-identify and provide recent documentation of his or her SEN to SEN Support. Reasonable accommodations or adjustments will be worked out amongst student, instructor(s) and SEN Support. If SEN Support is not aware of a student's needs, please contact sen@ust.hk to arrange a confidential discussion. All information is handled in the strictest confidence.