

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 Mondays 1130- 1300, 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)

Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Exilee* and *Temps 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)

The Search for General Tso (dir. Ian Cheney)
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. **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 behaviour 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.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **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.
6. **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 date TBA*)

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 date TBA*)

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. (*TBA*)

POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Good academic work depends on honesty and ethical behaviour. The quality of your work as a student relies on adhering to the principles of academic integrity and to the NTU Honour Code, a set of values shared by the whole university community. Truth, Trust and Justice are at the core of NTU's shared values.

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, it is important to acknowledge that AI use has already become widespread in our contemporary technological landscape due to political, institutional, and economic pressures. Nonetheless, when we use large language models (LLMs), we do so at significant costs to both our own learning and to the world around us. The training of new LLMs consumes fresh water and substantial energy at a rate that is currently hyper-accelerating the climate crisis (Strubell et al.; Xiao et al.) Recent research (Hua et al.; Kosmyna et al.) has found that over-reliance on LLMs measurably weakens your decision-making, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning while eroding long-term brain development and cognitive capacities.

In light of these documented facts, 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 HL4009, you are allowed **one (1) ChatGPT conversation** for the entire semester. If you have used ChatGPT for your essay assignment, you must **provide a single share link to this conversation** so I can verify that all AI use occurred in one place.
3. In addition, **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. No copying and pasting may be done into this document.
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. Generative AI is notoriously prone to hallucinating or misinterpreting quotes, sources, and citations. Hallucinated or misinterpreted quotes and sources in your essay undermine the reliability of your work, and will be penalised accordingly in your grade.
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
Week 1 (Jan 14)	Introduction: What is Asian American Literature?	<i>Administrative // Students form collaboration groups</i> In-class analysis: Mitski, "Strawberry Blond", "Your Best American Girl"
Week 2 (Jan 21)	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 28)	America in Asia (cont'd)	Viet Thanh Nguyen, <i>The Sympathizer</i> (Content warning: violence, sexual assault, and wartime trauma)
Week 4 (February 4)	America in Asia (cont'd)	Viet Thanh Nguyen, <i>The Sympathizer</i>
Week 5 (February 11)	Imagining Asia	Edward Said, Introduction to <i>Orientalism</i> Gene Luen Yang, <i>American Born Chinese</i> (Content warning: offensive racial stereotypes)
Week 6 (February 18)	Chinese New Year	N/A
Week 7 (February 25)	Imagining Asia (cont'd)	David Henry Hwang, <i>M. Butterfly</i> Collaborative assignment due Reshuffle collaboration groups
Recess Week		
Week 8 (March 11)	Media and Diaspora	Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, "audience distant relative", "Exilee", "Temps Morts", from <i>Exilee and Temps Morts</i> (printed book), and "Clio" from <i>Dictée</i> (to be uploaded as PDF)
Week 9 (March 18)	Media and Diaspora	Divya Victor, <i>Curb</i> (Content warning: racialised violence)
Week 10 (March 25)	Eating Asian America	Jenny Dorsey, "Asian in America: A Symbolic Three Course Meal" Michelle Zauner, Chapter 1 of <i>Crying in H Mart</i>
Week 11 (April 1)	N/A	<i>Prof on conference</i>
Week 12 (April 8)	Eating Asian America	<i>The Search for General Tso</i> (dir. Ian Cheney)
Week 13 (April 15)	Asia in America	<i>Past Lives</i> (dir. Celine Song) Exam briefing Term essays due (physical copies to be submitted in class)

