

ETHN 122: Asian American Culture & Identity

Professor: Thuy Vo Dang

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Office hours: Tues. 2-3pm, Thurs. 10-11am, or by appt.

T-Th 12:30-1:50 pm

Classroom: CSB 005

Office: SSB 249

Course Description

This course surveys Asian American cultural expressions in literature, film, and other popular venues to understand the social experiences that helped forge Asian American culture and identity. The course is divided into three units. We will examine the construction and negotiation of concepts such as Asian Americans and “Orientals,” the Model Minority, and Refugees. The first unit provides an overview of the stakes of cultural representations and examines the gendered construction of Asian Americans as “Orientals.” The second unit focuses on the ways in which the post-1965 immigration transformed the face of Asian America, posing new theoretical questions about identity and politics. Finally, the third unit will explore the Asian American refugee subject in order to critique the “immigrant narrative.” This course pays particular attention to the ways in which Asian Americans negotiate social forces in their everyday lives. Towards this end, we consider queerness, silence, and expressive cultural forms in order to explore questions of agency and identity for Asian American communities.

Required Texts

- Lan Cao, *Monkey Bridge*
- David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*
- Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*
- Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*

Articles on E-Reserve

* All books are available at Groundworks and on reserve in Geisel Library

Grading

- 20 % Attendance & Active Participation
- 10% Discussion Board
- 20 % Culture Night Comparative Analysis & Presentations
- 25% Midterm Exam
- 25% Final Project

*Late assignments will not be accepted.

Assignments & Grading Criteria

Attendance & Active Participation (20%)

You should come to class fully prepared to engage with the professor and your peers on the assigned readings for the week. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for this category. In order to have your absence be excused, you will need appropriate documentation such as a doctor's note. This course is designed to promote active participation and critical thinking for students. To fully benefit from this course, you should strive to engage in every aspect of learning, from contributing ideas in class discussion to thoughtful postings on the Discussion Board to seeking the professor and your peers' help when you have not fully grasped the course materials. Please turn off all cell phones and limit your use of laptops to note-taking while in the classroom. I will not tolerate social networking, personal emailing, and other inappropriate forms of internet usage during lecture and class discussions.

Discussion Board (10%)

Beginning the second week of class, you will be required to respond to a Discussion Board prompt (reading question, image, quote, video, etc.) on the WebCT page created for this class. Your posts should be at least 250 words and not to exceed 500 words. My prompt will be posted by Monday 12noon of the week and your deadline to complete your post will be the end of the week (Friday 12noon). Late submissions will not be accepted. This online work will take the place of class every other Thursday beginning the second week of class (see your schedule). Each post is worth 2.5 points (a total of 4 posts for 10% of your course grade). Your level of engagement with the online work will also count towards your Active Participation grade.

Culture Night Comparative Analysis & Presentations (20%)

You may opt to complete this assignment on your own or form groups of up to 4 individuals. You will need to attend 2 different Culture Nights sponsored by the various organizations on campus (see schedule of Culture Night performances) and write a comparative analysis of the performances, focusing on one major theme from this class. For example, you may analyze the performances through a critique of how Asian American gender and sexual identities are represented in each show or you may focus on how the shows negotiate transnational identities. Individual papers will need to be 3-4 pages in length and group papers will be 5-6 pages. You will also need to present your analysis (5 minutes for individuals and 10 minutes for groups). Presentations will begin during 7th week.

Midterm (25%)

This exam on April 28 (Tuesday) is in-class, closed-book and will require Blue Books. Come prepared! You will be given a study guide for this exam, so I encourage you to form study groups to review the materials from the first 4 weeks of class.

Final Project (25%)

You will be given the chance to represent Asian American culture and identity in this final project that requires you to choose a major theme from the course materials (cumulative) and create a cultural text that depicts, reflects on, or explores your chosen theme. Your cultural text can be a visual artwork (drawing, painting, photography, installation, etc.), video (short film, documentary, etc.), writing (poetry, prose, script), or music. You will need to submit a 1-page analysis of your cultural text. This project is due on Monday, June 8, 2009 between 10-11 AM in my office.

****YOU SHOULD COMPLETE ALL READINGS PRIOR TO TUESDAY LECTURES**** *schedule subject to change.*

Schedule

Part I. "Orientals" and Asian Americans

Wk.1 (31 Mar & 2 April) Introduction

Orientalism, Introduction

Lowe, Lisa. "Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique" in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997. pp. 1-36.

Schueller, Malini Johar. "The Culture of Asian Orientalism: Missionary Writings, Travel Writings, Popular Poetry," in *US Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature 1790-1890*. U of Minnesota Press, 2001. pp. 141-156.

Wk. 2 (7 & 9 April)**On Representation****no class on Thursday, April 9*

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation." *Framework* 36 (1989): 68-81.

Kim, Elaine H. "Multiple Mirrors and Many Images: New Directions in Asian American Literature." *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1982. pp. 214-279.

Stam, Robert and Ella Shohat. "Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle over Representation," *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994. pp.178-219.

Wk. 3 (14 &16 April)**Gender, Sexuality, and the National Romance**

M. Butterfly, all

Orientalism, Chapters 3 & 4

Buff, Rachel. "Im/migration Policy, the National Romance, and the Poetics of World Domination, 1945-1965," in *Immigration and the Political Economy of Home: West Indian Brooklyn and American Indian Minneapolis, 1954-1992*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. pp. 45-76.

Eng, David. "Heterosexuality in the Face of Whiteness: Divided Belief in *M. Butterfly*" and "Epilogue: Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies" in *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001. pp. 137-66, 204-28.

Screening: *M. Butterfly* (1993)

Part II. Post-1965 Cultural Transformations**Wk. 4 (21 & 23 April)****Post-1965 Immigration****no class on Thursday, April 23*

The Namesake, Chapters 1-7

Kibria, Nazli. "Not Asian, Black, or White?: Reflections on South Asian American Racial Identity" In *Asian American Studies: A Reader*, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu and Min Song. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000. pp. 247-54.

Luibheid, Eithne. "The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act: An 'End' to Exclusion?" *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 5:2(1997): 501-21.

Screening: *The Namesake* (2007)

Wk.5 (28 & 30 April)**Transnational Identities**

MIDTERM EXAM (APRIL 28)

The Namesake, Chapters 8-12

George, Sheba Mariam. "Transnational Connections: the Janus-Faced Production of an Immigrant Community" in *When Women Come First: Gender and Class in Transnational Migration*. Berkeley: UC Press, 2005. pp. 158-96.

Grewal, Inderpal. "Traveling Barbie: Indian Transnationalities and the Global Consumer," *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. pp. 80-120.

Wk.6 (5 & 7 May) **Problematizing the Model Minority** *no class on Thursday, May 7
Orientalism, Chapter 5

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. "Conclusion: Model Minorities and Bad Subjects" in *Race & Resistance: Literature & Politics in Asian America*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. pp. 143-71.

Park, Lisa Sun-Hee. "Continuing Significance of the Model Minority Myth: The Second Generation." *Social Justice* 35: 1(2008).

Part III. US Empire and the Asian American Refugee Subject

Wk.7 (12 & 14 May) **Representing Refugees**
Orientalism, Chapter 6

DuBois, Thomas A. "Constructions Construed: The Representations of Southeast Asian Refugees in Academic, Popular, and Adolescent Discourse," *Amerasia Journal* 19:3 (1993): 1-25.

Schein, Louisa and Thoj, Va-Megn. "Occult Racism: The Masking of Race in the Hmong Hunter Incident A Dialogue between Anthropologist Louisa Schein and Filmmaker/Activist Va-Megn Thoj" *American Quarterly* 59:4 (December 2007): 1051-1095.

Wk.8 (19 & 21 May) **Re-Thinking Silence** *no class on Thursday, May 21
Monkey Bridge, Chapters

Cheung, King-Kok. "Introduction" in *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997. pp. 1-26.

Duncan, Patti. "Introduction: The Uses of Silence and the Will to Unsay" in *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004. pp. 1-30.

Nguyen-vo Thu-Huong. "Forking Paths: How Shall We Mourn the Dead?" *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 31, no. 2, 2005, pp. 157-175.

Wk.9 (26 & 28 May) **Vietnamese Refugees**
Monkey Bridge, Chapters

Espiritu, Yen Le. "Toward a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in US Scholarship." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1:1&2(2006): 410-33.

Vo, Linda. "The Vietnamese American Experience: From Dispersion to the Development of Post-Refugee Communities." In *Asian American Studies: A Reader*, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu and Min Song. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000. pp. 209-305.

Vo Dang, Thuy. "Let the Memory Live Again" in *Nha Magazine* Nov/Dec 2007, pp. 36-43

Screening: *First Morning (Buoi Sang Dau Nam)*

Wk.10 (2 & 4 June)...Conclusions

Orientalism, Chapter 8

Campomanes, Oscar V. "New Formations of Asian American Studies and the Question of U.S. Imperialism," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 5:2 (1997): 523-550.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. "Speak of the Dead, Speak of Viet Nam: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Minority Discourse." *The New Centennial Review* 6:2 (2006): 7-37.

Majoring or Minor in Ethnic Studies at UCSD

Many students take an Ethnic Studies course because the topic is of great interest or because of a need to fulfill a social science, non-contiguous, or other college requirement. Often students have taken three or four classes out of "interest" yet have no information about the major or minor and don't realize how close they are to a major, a minor, or even a double major. An Ethnic Studies major is excellent preparation for a career in law, public policy, government and politics, journalism, education, public health, social work, international relations, and many other careers. If you would like information about the Ethnic Studies major or minor at UCSD, please contact Yolanda Escamilla, Ethnic Studies Department Undergraduate Advisor, at 858-534-3277 or yescamilla@ucsd.edu.