

CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

CULS5214: Politics of Cultural Identities

6 Sep – 2 Dec 2023 | Wednesdays: 2:30 pm – 5:15 pm | Fung King Hey building: SWH 2
Prof. Xuenan Cao, appointment by email



Course Description:

Where is the next film about “me?” Where are my home and my place in society? What do we tell ourselves about “self?” and “other?” After you study the politics of cultural identities for a while, people might assume you understand a lot of important facts about cultures, media, and politics. That knowledge will be part of the class, but that is not all. This course will teach the general skills required to understand how culture shapes the ideas of *I*, *they*, *my* body, *our* nation, *this* country, and *that* ethnic group. We will practice how to work with “big” concepts, such as coloniality, nationality, gender, class, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism, through examples from movies, documentaries, advertisements, artworks, and social media. The goal is to understand the dilemmas and contradictions in contemporary cultural politics.

A lot of theoretical questions have been raised around the concept of “identities,” a central theme of cultural studies since the 1990s. Social, technological, political, and economic contexts foreground and distinguish the self and the other. As a broad, accessible seminar and lecture course on various critical approaches to identities, this course introduces ideas from post-Enlightenment discourses to post-modernism, from sociological and anthropological to historicist explanations.

Course Objectives:

- **Identify narratives** about identities, describe the multi-layered making of a narrative verbally, and evaluate how narratives cohere.
- **Restate social issues** with references to identities in media and art
- **Critically assess** the contributing social and historical factors of cultural identities.
- **Recognize contradictions** in cultural representations and offer explanations for them.

Chat Room:

You are very welcome to drop in on Zoom at the following hours for chatting with the professor in Putonghua, Cantonese, or English. This is an informal setting in which you can ask questions, raise concerns, or just come and listen in for conversations.

Chat Room 1: Friday 10:00am-10:45am

Chat Room 2: Friday 11:00am-11:45am

Chat room will be available from September 8 to October 27.

Grading:

Attendance	15%
In-Class and Forum Participation	15%
Written Reflection 1	30%
Written Reflection 2	30%
<u>Final debate (self-assessment)</u>	<u>10%</u>
Total	100%

Course Assignments:

Attendance and Participation—30% (Each accounting for 15 %)

Attendance and contribution to the in-class activities and the online forum are critical components of the course and of your grade. It is essential that students complete all of the required readings before each class and be ready to participate in activities. Efforts to engage with peers will also be taken into consideration when calculating the participation grade.

Written Reflections — 60% (Each accounting for 30 %)

Minimum of 2-3 pages, or 500-800 words. You are encouraged to write more than the required length. The best parts of your writing will count towards your final grade.

An essay is a concise, question-driven reflection about the required readings of a chosen week and draw from your personal experience and other readings. You are free to choose the two weeks on which you will write your mini-essays. In the reflection essay, you need to summarize the readings discussed in the lecture, the central questions raised by the author, supporting or counter examples to the author's argument.

Final Debate (self-assessment) — 10% Minimum of 2-3 pages, or 500-800 words.

The debate will be conducted in the final class, as a group. It will be a self-organized event where each side will present their best argument in a given format. The result of the debate will be an anonymous vote in-class, counted by the TA. Each student will then rate their own contribution to the debate abased on scale of 1-5 points. If you think you have done an excellent job in preparation for your own team, you can give yourself a pat on the back and 5 points.

Weekly Agenda

<p>Sept 6</p> <p>Topic 1 Course Introduction</p>	<p>Introductory activities: On Cultural legitimization</p> <p>Introductory lecture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who needs an identity? • A brief history of “identity politics” in cultural studies, Asian studies, and China studies. 	<p>Documentary trailer:</p> <p><i>Dream Empire</i></p> <p>This is a documentary about the use of white people in marketing in China, which in turn contributed to the housing bubble and ghost cities.</p>
<p>Reading: Rey Chow, “The Postcolonial Difference: Lessons in Cultural Legitimization,” 20-29.</p>		
<p>On “Self”</p>		
<p>Sept 13</p> <p>Topic 2 Concepts of Self I</p>	<p>Who has challenged the human’s self-identity from post-Enlightenment to post-human?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freud • Weber→Habermas 	<p>Artworks</p>
<p>Reading: 1-13, Alex Watson, “Who Am I? The Self/Subject According to Psychoanalytic Theory.”</p>		
<p>Sept 15 8:00pm Make-up Class on Auto-theory, including a Zoom conversation with a guest lecturer.</p>		
<p>Sept 20</p> <p>Topic 3 Concepts of Self II</p>	<p>Who has challenged the human’s self-identity from post-Enlightenment to post-human?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marx→Baudrillard 	<p>Movie excerpts:</p> <p><i>Metropolis</i> <i>Fight Club</i></p>
<p>Reading: 1-11, Marx on “Alienation,” from 1844 Manuscript, Section on Estranged Labor, this is a slightly abridged version from MarxistArchive.org</p>		
<p>Sept 23 (Saturday)</p> <p>Topic 4 Sound and Identities Guest workshop by sound artist and Professor Marcel Zeas Sagesser</p>		
<p>Sept 27</p> <p>Topic 5 Concepts of Self III</p>	<p>Cultural identities in the age of digitality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haraway→Digital feminism 	<p>Animation excerpts:</p> <p><i>Ghost in the Shell</i> (about robots, love, sex, and cyborgs)</p>

	Reading: 1-14, "Introduction" to <i>Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto</i> , by Legacy Russell, on queer, racialized identity online.	
On "Other"		
Oct 4 Topic 6 Political Economy I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking up to white people in China <p>First written reflection due.</p>	Documentary Excerpts: <i>Dream Empire</i>
	Reading: xvi -xvii, "Introduction" to <i>Talking up to White People</i> by Aileen Moreton-Robinson.	
Oct 11 Topic 7 Political Economy II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trafficking in minorities: -people of lesser social economic standing 	Movie excerpts: <i>A Touch of Sin</i>
	Reading: 103-124, "The Elites, the Natives, and the Outsiders: Migration and Labor Market Segmentation in Urban China," Cindy Fan in <i>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</i>	
Review		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asia as Method: Coloniality and De-colonization <p>Reading: 1-16, "Introduction" to <i>Asia as Method</i> by Kuan-Hsing Chen;</p>		
Oct 18 Topic 8 Imaginary Community I	How come <i>I</i> identify with <i>them</i> ?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nationality → Immigration -Guest workers in Europe -Internal migrants in China -Ethnicity and Class <p>Question: How do migrants become "productive laborers?" Which type of migrants were chosen?</p> <p>Second written reflection due.</p>	
Reading: Excerpts of ethnographies: Xinjiang Migrants 70-73, 85-88, <i>Terror Capitalism</i>		
American Indian Boarding Schools https://www.npr.org/2008/05/12/16516865/american-indian-boarding-schools-haunt-many		
Oct 25 Topic 9 Imaginary Community II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can One Say No to Chinese-ness? Performing Chineseness 	Documentary Excerpts: <i>Regardless of Race</i> – Full episode on YouTube
	Reading: 223-242, Ien Ang, "Can One Say No to Chineseness," <i>boundary 2</i>	

Nov (date to be determined)

Topic 10 Identities and Home ownership

Screening: documentary *Dream Empire*

Nov (date to be determined)

Topic 11 Identities and mobility

Screening: movie *Drifting*

[Final Debate November 25](#)

Do “irregular” immigrants have to right to stay after years of “belonging” to a community without legal status? (Think about the maid services in HK and internal migrants in China)

[Reading: 1-19, *Right to Stay* by Joseph Carens](#)

Class Policies:

Late Attendance: Attendance is mandatory and is part of the requirement for passing the course. Late attendance will result in loss of attendance and participation points.

Absence: Please communicate with the professor about absences. Absences must be accompanied with a formal explanation in accordance with university guidelines. Each absence will incur the loss of one attendance point. More than 25% absence (i.e., missing more than 3 weeks out of a 13-week module) will result in the lowering of one grade level (e.g. A- to B-).

Late Work: No work will be accepted after the deadline.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Work for which plagiarism is proved will be awarded a grade of zero and relevant disciplinary procedures will be followed with the institution.

Email Notice: All students must check their emails for useful information, class announcements, and last-minute changes.

Supplementary Readings

The following readings are not included in the weekly agenda, but they help reinforce your understandings of the lecture and readings. You can read them according to your interests. All supplementary readings will be uploaded on the course site for you to download.

Francis Fukuyama. *Identity*.

Benedict Anderson, *Imaginary Communities*

Macfie, A.L. *Orientalism: A Reader*.

Rey Chow (edited). *Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory*