

CULS5202: Asian Modernities and City Cultures

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)

Prof. Elmo GONZAGA
Division of Cultural Studies
egonzaga@cuhk.edu.hk

Schedule: Tuesdays, 6:45-9:30pm
Venue: Wong Foo Yuan Building (FYB) UG02
Medium of instruction: English

Modernity is simultaneously the “transient,” “fleeting,” and “contingent” as well as the “eternal” and “immutable,” Charles Baudelaire wrote in the face of Baron Hausmann’s demolition and renovation of mid 19th century Paris. Ruminating on Manila’s colonial modernity from his vantage point in late 19th century Madrid and Berlin, José Rizal described the “specter of comparisons,” in which distant cities mirrored each other like inverted images in a telescope. For Lu Xun, the shock of recognition of China’s state of cosmopolitan modernity derived from his experience of its visualization through slide lanterns and movie theaters in early 20th century Shanghai.

This course is interested in how modernity is defined by contradiction and plurality not simply within the same city but across disparate geographic locations and historical periods. Looking at the variances of urban modernity in places like Tokyo, Seoul, Bangkok, Singapore, Jakarta, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Tehran, Dhaka, Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Shenzhen, Beijing, Taipei, and Hong Kong, we will examine how blueprints for modernist, global, creative, and smart cities are articulated within the greater Asia region. Such templates are often standardized, top-down visions for urban renewal, economic growth, and technological progress with contrasting degrees of triumphalism and failure. The focus on metropolitan areas and city clusters offers a way of thinking beyond (or beneath) the nation. Uncovering characteristic tropes in film and visual cultures of the city, we will explore how multiple modernities are produced, disseminated, consumed, and reproduced through different ecologies of cinema, photography, visual art, architecture, maps, comic books, video games, and social media. Embracing a more expansive definition, we will regard Asia as sprawling, archipelagic, and diverse, inclusive of the marginalized, diasporic populations of Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

We will ask: How can the complex flows, processes, and rhythms of a modern metropolis be visualized? How do media representations capture the social and economic changes that prevail in the shift to modes of governmentality characteristic of the conditions of neoliberal capitalism, media convergence, and immaterial production? How do cinema and architecture articulate the dynamisms and tensions of modern flows and rhythms to reshape work productivity, public order, and collective memory? How are the voices and rights of the burgeoning class of cosmopolitan consumers and transnational migrants domesticated, excluded, and recuperated in cultural imaginaries of the modern Asian city?

SCHEDULE

Week 1: Visualizing the Asian Metropolis (Jan 9)

Required:

- James C. Scott, "Cities, People, Language," in *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 53-83

Recommended:

- Yomi Braester, "Film and the Urban Contract," in *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25
- Pamela Corey, "On Contemporary Art, History, and Urban Form in Vietnam and Cambodia," in *City in Time: Contemporary Art and Urban Form in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021), pp. 3-20

Week 2: Street Mapping and Locative Media (Jan 16)

Required:

- Mark Monmonier, "Map Generalization: Little White Lies and Lots of Them," *How to Lie with Maps*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 25-42

Recommended:

- Edmund R. Tufte, "Micro/Macro Readings" and "Layering and Separation," *Envisioning Information* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1990), pp. 36-51 & 52-65
- Phil Ethington, "Los Angeles Ghost Maps," and Diane Favro and Chris Johanson, "Rome: Jumping over the Line," *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities*, eds. Todd Presner, David Shepard, and Yoh Kawano (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 66-73 & 128-133
- Nadav Hochman and Lev Manovich, "Zooming into an Instagram City: Reading the Local through Social Media," *First Monday* 18 (2013)

Week 3: Guest Lecture (Jan 23)

Week 4: Spectacular Architecture and Urban Speculation (Jan 30)

Required:

- Aihwa Ong, "Hyperbuilding: Spectacle, Speculation, and the Hyperspace of Sovereignty," in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Malden, Ma: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 205-225

Recommended:

- Stephen Graham, "Skywalk/Skytrain/Skydeck: Multilevel Cities," in *Vertical: The City from Satellites to Bunkers* (London: Verso, 2016), pp. 220-243
- David Grahame Shane, "A Short History of Hong Kong Malls and Towers" and Cecilia L. Chu, "Narrating the Mall City," *Mall City: Hong Kong's Dreamworlds of Consumption*, ed. Stefan Al (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), pp. 35-50 and 83-90

Week 5: Art in the Global City (Feb 6)

Required:

- Daniel P.S. Goh, "Walking in the Global City: The Politics of Rhythm and Memory in Singapore," *Space and Culture* 17, no. 1 (2014): 16-28

Recommended:

- Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Branding Creativity: Creative Cities, Street Art, and 'Making Your Name Sing,'" in *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), pp. 91-124
- Julie Peteet, "The Writing on the Walls: The Graffiti of the Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1996): 139-159

Week 6: LUNAR NEW YEAR HOLIDAY (Feb 9-15)

Week 7: City Museums and Heritage Spaces (Feb 20)

Required:

- Jordan Sand, "Museums, Heritage, Everyday Life," in *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces: Local Histories, Found Objects* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 110-141

Recommended:

- Abidin Kusno, "The Shophouse and the Chinese," in *After the New Order: Space, Politics, and Jakarta* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), pp. 28-48
- Michael Herzfeld, "The Blight of Beautification: Bangkok and the Pursuit of Class-Based Urban Purity," *Journal of Urban Design* 22, no. 3 (2017): 291-307

Week 8: Slum Voyeurism (Feb 27)

Required:

- Bianca Freire-Medeiros, "Tourism in 'the Largest Favela in Latin America,'" in *Touring Poverty* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 74-110

Recommended:

- Ravi Sundaram, "Media Urbanism," in *Pirate Modernity: Media Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 67-104
- Katrina Macapagal, "Sounds of Youth: The Production of Noise and Chronotopes of Performance in *Respeto*," in *Slum Imaginaries and Spatial Justice in Philippine Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. 156-74

Week 9: Developmental Ruins (Mar 5)

Required:

- George Steinmetz, "Harrowed Landscapes: White Ruingazers in Namibia and Detroit and the Cultivation of Memory," *Visual Studies* 23, no. 3 (2008): 211-237

Recommended

- Andrew Alan Johnson, "Progress and its Ruins: Ghosts, Migrants, and the Uncanny in Thailand," *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2013): 299-319
- Jie Li, "Factory Rubble," in *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), pp. 192-226

Week 10: Neon Noir (Mar 12)

Required:

- Edward Dimendberg, "Centripetal Space," in *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 86-118

Recommended:

- Gina Marchetti, "Running on Karma: Hong Kong Noir and the Political Unconscious," in *Hong Kong Neo-Noir*, eds. Esther Yau and Tony Williams (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 97-117
- Lalita Gopalan, "Bombay Noir," in *Cinemas Dark and Slow in Digital India* (Cham, SW: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 175-207

Week 11: Film screening (Mar 19)

Submission of summary of final project (Mar 19)

Week 12: Consultations on final project (Mar 26)

Week 13: Field trip (Apr 2)

Week 14: Presentation on final project (Apr 9)

Week 15: Submission of critical reflection (Apr 16)

Submission of final project (Apr 21)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- 1) To become acquainted with the key issues and debates in cultural studies of Asian modernities
- 2) To explain how cultural and media representations visualize and problematize the complex social, economic, and historical conditions of different Asian Cities
- 3) To apply a comparative, transnational lens to examine the distinct histories and cultures of diverse spatial environments and media ecologies across the greater Asian region

ASSESSMENT

Class participation – 15%

Please make sure you have thoroughly read the required readings. You are expected to participate actively during lectures, presentations, and discussions by posing relevant questions and insights. In every class session, different students will be called on to share their thoughts or questions. Your responses to your classmates will also be assessed.

Group-led discussion of recommended reading (30 mins.) – 20%

In each session beginning the end of the add-drop period, groups of students will be assigned to lead the discussion of the recommended readings. For your presentation, your group should: 1) present a summary of your recommended reading's key terms, concepts, and arguments about Asian modernity and city culture in relation to the title or theme of the session. It

should also: 2) explain how these ideas might be applicable to examples of film and visual cultures of other Asian cities not mentioned in the assigned readings for that session. Questions will be asked during and after your discussion to clarify and test your understanding of the assigned reading.

This requirement will be marked based on the depth and clarity of your understanding of the assigned readings, which the members of your group will demonstrate during the presentation. The organization and coherence of the presentation will be taken as evidence of your group's effort and preparedness. Part of your grade will also come from the quality, suitability, and uniqueness of your examples.

By 2pm of your presentation date, you should email to your instructor and TA your 1) group slideshow and 2) individual presenter notes to facilitate grading.

Multimodal critical reflection (400-600 words + 2 images) – 20%

Each student will write a critical reflection that documents your experience of Asian modernity and city culture during the field trip. This multimodal paper will combine written text with self-produced photos.

Choose one important concept about Asian urban modernity discussed in class. You will take 2 photos of different sights, images, or spaces during the field trip that would illustrate or challenge this concept. The accompanying written text of 400-600 words should provide 1) a clear and concise definition of the concept, and 2) an insightful and coherent analysis of how these 2 photos would illustrate or challenge the concept.

This requirement will be marked based on the depth, originality, and clarity of the understanding it demonstrates in its explanation of its ideas and their application. The suitability of the chosen concept for the articulations of modernity captured in the photos will factor into the grade.

Group project (short film of 10-15 mins. or annotated map with 5-6 locations) + paper (2000-3000 words) – 40%

Group presentation of final project (8-10 mins.) – 5%

For your final requirement for the course, you will work in groups with two options to produce either: 1) a short film or 2) an annotated map, which visualizes the marginalized realities of Asian modernity and city culture.

The accompanying paper should explain how a selection of key ideas from at least 4 different class sessions is being applied in the conceptualization and production of this film or map. The paper is expected to quote or reference key ideas from the different assigned readings.

This requirement will be graded based on the depth, originality, and clarity of the understanding it demonstrates in its depiction of its locations and explanation of its ideas. Additional credit will be given to the quality and professionalism in the production of the film or map. Lastly, the presentation of the project will be marked for its organization and coherence.

Each group should submit a summary of the proposed project of 400-500 words in bullet-point format, which concisely describes its plans for the project and the ideas to be applied. Based on this proposal, the instructor will help you develop your project during a one-on-one consultation.

During our final meeting, your group will present to the rest of the class a summary of your project, which will be your last opportunity to receive feedback before submitting the final version.

GRADING RUBRIC

A (Exceptional) – The paper or project greatly exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented not only about the chosen example but also about the concepts used. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the concepts used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the concept and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organized. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

A- (Outstanding) – The paper or project exceeds the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used that goes beyond the scope of the class discussion. The language used to explain the theory and its application is complex yet lucid. The writing is grammatically correct and coherently organized. The chosen example is unique for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

B+ (Very Good) – The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. Fresh insights are presented about the chosen example. The paper or project displays a comprehensive understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is coherently organized. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

B (Good) – The paper or project more than meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example could have been developed further. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is lucid. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project was submitted by the deadline.

B- (More than Satisfactory) – The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a sufficient understanding of either the chosen example or the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is moderately coherent. The chosen example is suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

C+ (Satisfactory) – The paper or project meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used lack elaboration or development. The paper or project displays a basic understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is understandable. The writing is slightly coherent. The chosen example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

C, C- (Fair) – The paper or project barely meets the expectations for this requirement. The insights presented about the chosen example or theory used are vaguely elaborated. The paper or project fails to display a sufficient understanding of the chosen example and the theory used. The language used to explain the theory and its application is virtually understandable. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example may not be suitable for the topic. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

D+, D (Pass) – The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. No additional insights are presented about the chosen example or the theory used on top of what was discussed in class. The language used to explain the theory and its application are almost incomprehensible. The writing is incoherent. The chosen example is irrelevant. The paper or project may have been submitted late.

F (Fail) – The paper or project does not meet the expectations for this requirement. The language and writing are poor. The chosen example is irrelevant. The theory used was not covered in class. The paper or project may have been submitted long past the deadline.

ACADEMIC ETHICS

You are expected to abide by the university's principles and regulations on academic honesty. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with the information on the following webpage:

<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academiconesty/>.

Violations such as plagiarized papers or multiple submissions will not be tolerated in any form. These will be subject to disciplinary action. Remember that all words, phrases, or ideas taken from sources other than your own submitted assignment must be properly cited.

By submitting your papers for assessment, you are acknowledging that ChatGPT or a similar AI platform was not used in any way in the production of this written assignment.

When in doubt about an assignment with a possible violation, please feel free to consult the instructor.