CURE3008: Global Cultural Theories
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
2024-25 Term 1

Lecture: Mondays, 10:30-12:15pm,
LPN Lecture Theatre (G/F), at YC Liang Hall (LHC)

Tutorials: Mondays, 12:30-1:15pm,
Venue 1: LPN Lecture Theatre (G/F), at YC Liang Hall (LHC)
Venue 2: Lee Shau Kee Building, Room 212
TA to be confirmed
Medium of Instruction: English

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Why study theories? What does it mean to theorise? For whom do we theorise? Where are potential sites and mediums for theorising to happen? How could we theorise with sensitivities to contexts, particularities and differences, and what are their relations to theories and theorising? This course aspires to engage with some such questions, bearing in mind how engagement with, and the use of theory does not mean theory is universal and abstract, but understood as bodies of thought in response to, and informed by prevailing shifts and complexities they may have been surrounded by.

Departing from the dominant canon of critical theory, this course aims to introduce students to a wider, more diverse range of theoretical texts and frameworks by marginalised voices and from peripheral locations. In the wake of epitaphs about the poverty or death of critical theory, this course explores how theory might have continued significance and impact through its intervention in social reality and creative practice. First, theory could be applied as an analytical tool to comprehend and confront urgent issues of inequality and injustice. Second, theory's entanglement with verbal language could be overcome through asking how film and visual art could potentially offer sources for theorising.

This course seeks to also decolonise theory by multiplying the sites of intellectual and critical inquiry. Instead of treating Benjamin, Adorno, Hall, Mulvey, and Grossberg as representative of the corpus of theory, it engages with prevailing discussions in Postcolonial Studies and Black Studies. It also moves beyond the call for 'de-North Americanisation' by looking at theoretical texts and frameworks produced in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The course concludes by exploring work about environmentalism and technology.

The course is designed for advanced undergraduates with familiarity in critical approaches to literature, cinema, art, and media.

Learning Outcomes:
- To become acquainted with theoretical texts and frameworks in Cultural Studies by marginalised voices from different peripheral social and geographic contexts
- To engage with theory as a body of thought to analyse the articulation of race, gender, memory, and nature in literature, cinema, art, and media
- To formulate, develop, write, and revise an original critical essay using global cultural theories

Assessment:

Class Attendance and Participation: 10%
You are expected to read the readings, and express your own thoughts and questions relevant to the readings. This would translate to your contribution during class discussions The questions I am looking for are not factual or general questions (eg. Who is theorist so-and-so, what does 'queer' mean, etc.) that can be quickly answered by searching online. Rather, the questions and thoughts should come from how you have understood the reading, what you may not still understand, or in relation to the theories' ideas/ concepts and argument of the readings.

Tutorial presentation (5-7mins) and response to two questions: 15% + 5%
After the add-drop period, each student would present one of the theories covered in class and how this theory engages with your chosen cultural text from Asia (eg. Short film clip, poster, advertisement, short segment of a song, artwork, social media video or image, short video game scene or clip, etc). Presentation of the theory and your cultural text example may also highlight some new insights, or possible challenges/limitations of these theories.

Short critical reflection (400-600 words): 25%
Choose and comment on a piece of cultural text from Asia, engaging with one theory covered in the course. Your reflection should briefly state your understanding of the theory, and how and why you think this theory is relevant to the analysis of your chosen cultural text, and how this cultural texts illustrates, expands and/or challenges the theory. Submission deadline is **4 November 2024 (Monday), 11.59pm** on Blackboard.

Final paper (2000-3000 words) and presentation (5-7minutes): 40% + 5%
For this final paper, you could either
1. Choose a cultural text (eg. short story, fairy tale, song, poem) that you may have been discontented with, and rewrite/recreate it (1000-1500 words), after having engaged with one to at most two of the theoretical texts discussed in this course. You would also include a short commentary piece (1000-1500 words), explaining your discontentment with the original cultural text, and how the theories have been relevant in your rewriting of this cultural text; OR
2. Choose two to at most three theoretical texts covered in this course, and analyse it alongside an Asian cultural text. The paper should include your understanding of

these theoretical texts' key concepts and ideas, as well as demonstrate how your close and concrete analysis of the cultural text engages with these theories.

Submission deadline is **8 Dec 2024 (Sunday), 11.59pm** on Blackboard.

Course Schedule:

Week 1 (2 Sept): No Classes

Inauguration Ceremony for Undergraduates

Week 2 (9 Sept): What does it mean to theorise culture?

How has culture been typically defined and analysed in Cultural Studies? How can we move beyond dominant frameworks of Cultural Studies?

Required:

- Lawrence Grossberg, "The Heart of Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 7-30

Recommended:

- Shih Shu-mei and Françoise Lionnet, "Introduction: The Creolisation of Theory", in *The Creolisation of Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 1-33
- Melani Budianta, "Smart kampung: doing cultural studies in the Global South", *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies,* 16:3, pp. 241-256

Week 3 (16 Sept): Postcolonialism and Anticolonialism

How has the epistemic and military violence of colonialism been critiqued using theory?

Required:

- Jini Kim Watson and Gary Wilder, "Thinking the Postcolonial Contemporary," in The Postcolonial Contemporary: Political Imaginaries for the Global Present, eds. Jini Kim Watson and Gary Wilder (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), pp. 1-29

Recommended:

- Mohandas K. Gandhi, "Civilization," "What is True Civilization," "Brute Force," "Passive Resistance," and "Machinery," in Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule (1909; Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938)
- Gayatri Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 203-236

Week 4 (23 Sept): Decolonial Thought/s and Knowledge Production

What are the efforts to uncover alternative methods to the dominant frameworks of knowledge production?

Required:

- Chen Kuan Hsing, "Asia as Method: Overcoming the Present Conditions of Knowledge Production", in *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 211-256

Recommended:

- Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American modernity/coloniality research program", *Cultural Studies,* Vol. 21, Nos. 2-3, March/May 2007, pp. 179-210
- Raewyn Connell, "Chapter 6: Islam and Western Dominance", in *Southern Theory: the Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 111-137

Week 5 (30 Sept): Image as Critique

How can images from film and visual art offer sources for intellectual and critical inquiry?
Required:

- Laura Marks, "The Memory of Touch," in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 127-193

Recommended:

- Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning," in *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 90-107
- Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), pp. 31-45

Week 6 (7 Oct): Gender

How can feminist or queer readings subvert fixed norms of cultural identity and representation?

Required:

- Maria Lugones, "Chapter 3: On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism", in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorising Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (United States of America: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), pp. 82-91

Recommended:

- Radhika Govindrajan, "Chapter 6: The Bear Who Loved a Woman-the Intersection of Queer Desires", in *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), pp. 146-172
- Petrus Liu, "Chinese Queer Theory," in *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 34-84

Week 7 (14 Oct): Race

How can theory expose and disturb unspoken structures and practices of racism?
Required:

- Sara Ahmed, "Chapter 3: The Orient and Other Others", in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 109-156

Recommended:

- Frantz Fanon, "The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized," in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; New York: Penguin, 2019), pp. 64-88

- Simone Browne, "B®anding Blackness: Biometric Technology and the Surveillance of Blackness", in *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 89-130

Week 8 (21 Oct): Migration and Mobility

How do the departures and arrivals of migrants trouble and transform fixed national and ethnic identities?

Required:

- Benedict Anderson, "Introduction" & "Cultural Roots," in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 1-7 & 9-36

Recommended:

- Arnika Fuhrmann, "The Ghost Seer: Chinese Thai Minority Subjectivity, Female Agency, and the Transnational Uncanny in the Films of Danny and Oxide Pang", in *Ghostly Desires: Queer Sexuality and Vernacular Buddhism in Contemporary Thai Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 87-121
- Paul Gilroy, "'Jewels Brought from Bondage': Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity," in *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 72-110

Week 9 (28 Oct): History, Memory and Trauma

How do conceptions of history and time provide a means for imagining alternate futures amid an oppressive present?

Required:

- David Scott, "Futures Past", in *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 23-57

Recommended:

- Saidiya Hartman, "Notes on Method" and "An Intimate History of Slavery and Freedom," in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: Norton, 2019), pp. xiii-xv and 45-76
- Marisol de la Cadena, "Mariano's Archive: The Eventfulness of the Ahistorical," in *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 118-151

Week 10 (4 Nov): Film Screening

Pendatang (2023), a Malaysian dystopian drama thriller, written by Lim Boon Siang, directed by Ng Ken Kin

Submission of short critical reflections (4 Nov, 11.59pm)

Week 11 (11 Nov): Ecology and the Non-Human

How do indigenous and vernacular beliefs about the natural and animal world offer new ideas about the relationship between humans and the environment?

Required:

- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Part I Interlude: Smelling, Chapter 11: Life of the Forest" and "Chapter 13: Resurgence", in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 45-52, and pp.179-190

Recommended:

- Brianne Cohen, "Visualising Animal Trauma and Empty Forest Syndrome in the Moving Imagery of Tuân Andrew Nguyễn", *Art Journal*, 81:4, 2022, pp. 44-61
- Cajetan Iheka, "Waste Reconsidered: Afrofuturism, Technologies of the Past, and the History of the Future," in *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), pp. 26-63

Week 12 (18 Nov): Final paper consultation

Week 13 (25 Nov): Technology and Society

How have theories of technology allowed deeper understandings of its relations, promises and anxieties with societies?

Required:

- Toshiya Ueno, "Techno-Orientalism and Media-Tribalism: On Japanese Animation and Rave Culture", *Third Text* 13, no. 47 (1999): 95-106

Recommended:

- Shoshana Zuboff, "The Elaboration of Surveillance Capitalism: Kidnap, Corner, Compete", in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019)
- Yuki Sone, "Chapter 2: Robotics and Representation", in *Japanese Robot Culture: Performance, Imagination and Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 37-60

Week 14 (2 Dec): Final paper presentation

Final paper submission: 8 Dec, 11.59pm

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 organised. 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 organised. 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 organised. 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 familiarise yourself with the information on the following webpage: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/

Violations such as plagiarised 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.

All written assignments must be accompanied by a VeriGuide receipt, a signed declaration acknowledging your awareness of and subscription to the university's policies and regulations on academic integrity. Written assignments submitted without a VeriGuide receipt will not be accepted and graded.

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