ETHN 122: Asian American Culture and Identity

Professor: Chuong-Dai Vo
Office Hours: Wednesday 11 am-12 pm, 2:30 pm-4:30 pm
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Course Description
This course will examine Asian American culture as a site of anti-racist and anti-imperalist American social formation. We will start with film as a tool of Asian American activism, and look specifically at San Francisco, the site of the earliest mass mobilization of activists inside and outside the academy. We will transition to literature to look at how the arrival of the “refugee” transformed Asian America. We will end by looking at visual culture and poetry, two artistic media seldom associated with Asian Americans. Throughout the course, we will think about the relationship among genre, Asian American cultural formation, and Asian American community formation.

Grade Distribution
Weekly Quizzes on Films and Readings 30%
Midterm 30%
Final 40%

Readings (Books are available at Groundworks)
1. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Dictee (UC Press, 1982/2001)
2. Frances Chung, Crazy Melon and Chinese Apple (Wesleyan UP, 2000)
3. Le thi diem thuy, the gangster we are all looking for (Random House, 2004)
5. Elaine Kim, Margo Machida and Sharon Mizota, Fresh Talk Daring Gazes (UC Press, 2003)
6. Essays will be available through Geisel Library’s online course reserve

Films on reserve
1. Curtis Chow, dir. The Fall of the I-Hotel (1983, 58 min), FVLV 3505-1
3. Wayne Wang, dir. Chan is Missing (1982, 80 min)

Week 1: Introduction to Asian America
- Renee Tajima-Peña, dir. My America (…or honk if you love Buddha)

Week 2: The beginnings of Asian American activism through filmmaking
- Curtis Chow, The Fall of the I-Hotel (documentary; watch in Geisel Library)


Week 3: Film representations of Asian Americans

- Wayne Wang, Chan is Missing (watch in Geisel Library)

Week 4: Film as self-representation and the new face of Asian America

- Spencer Nakasako and Sokly Ny, dirs. A.K.A. Don Bonus (watch in Geisel Library)
- Le thi diem thuy, the gangster we are all looking for (the first half)

***Midterm essay assigned

Week 5: The Cold War and the new face of Asian America

- Le thi diem thuy, the gangster we are all looking for (finish)

***Midterm essay due at beginning of class

Week 6: The Cold War and the new face of Asian America

- Dinh Linh, Blood and Soap

Week 7: Introduction to Asian American visual culture

- Karin Higa, “Hidden in Plain Sight: Little Tokyo Between the Wars”, in Chang, Johnson and Karlstrom, 31-53.

Week 8: Contemporary Asian American visual culture

- Elaine Kim, Margo Machida and Sharon Mizota, Fresh Talk Daring Gazes

Week 9: Asian American poetry

- Frances Chung, Crazy Melon and Chinese Apple

Week 10: Asian American poetry

- Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Dictee