

Asian American Speculative Fictions: ETHN 124/LTEN 181

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Office Hours: Tu, Th 2-4 pm (or by appointment) via Zoom

Course Description

This class addresses a range of speculative fictions—broadly defined—by Asian American and Asian diasporic writers. From ancient monsters to sentient software, the texts we will explore in this class reflect on the ways that Asian American literary production uses the process of *speculation* to both reflect upon the turbulent twentieth- and twenty-first century dynamics around race, gender, technology, and war that have shaped contemporary Asian America.

Required Texts

***Severance*, Ling Ma**

***Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid**

***Exhalation*, Ted Chiang**

***Interior Chinatown*, Charles Yu**

Requirements

- Discussion Board posts (50%)
- Weekly reading responses (25%)
- Final paper or project (25%)

Class Format

Given the unusual circumstances of this quarter, and the ongoing potential for disruption, this course will be run asynchronously (that is, we will not be all videoconferencing in at the same time every week). I have also made the decision to suspend discussion sections and replace them with smaller discussion groups, which will be run through Canvas.

The new weekly schedule will run as follows:

1. I will post a new video lecture **every Tuesday morning at 9 am** on Canvas.
2. In your online discussion groups (on Canvas), I would like you to:
 - a. Discuss, in a dedicated thread, the questions that I pose during the lecture.
 - b. Ask any additional questions (if any) that you have about the text or the topics/ideas addressed in the lecture.
 - c. All members of the discussion group must check in and post to the discussion board **by 9 am on Thursday**.

3. On **Friday at 9 am**, I will post a short response video that follows up on the ideas and questions brought up in your discussion groups. In that video, I will also give an overview/introduction to the next reading.
4. Complete your reading and upload a short reading response (for details, see below) to Canvas **by 9 am on Monday**. Each response should direct our attention to a **specific passage or paragraph** from the week's reading.

Discussion Board posts (50%)

I am looking for posts that can be informal, but show engagement with both the lecture material and with your classmates' ideas. We encourage opinions, debate, and humor, but please remain respectful of your classmates in all interactions. The first discussion board post will be due on **Thursday, 9am**; you will have until **Friday 9am** to review and comment on your group members' posts.

To get full credit for this discussion board, you must be an engaged participant and post at least 2x during the weekly comment period (e.g. one initial comment + one response to another's comment; or two responses to others' comments).

Reading Responses (25%)

Reading responses are due every other Monday before midnight. These reflections / questions are a little more formal than the lecture discussions, and should include a **citation to a specific passage or paragraph from the week's reading**. You may choose to do a close reading analysis of it to connect it to a larger theme you see in the reading, ask a question about it, or both. These posts also serve as an informal weekly writing assignment and should be **around 300-500 words in length, not including the cited passage**.

Your overall response grade will be the average of all of your reading responses; however, you will be allowed to drop your lowest grade.

I have posted a grading rubric and sample response – they are under “Files” in Canvas. Please let me or your TA know if you have any questions or concerns.

Final paper or creative project (25%)

Over the course of the quarter, we will be discussing the ways that Asian American speculative fictions both reflect on the past and reconsider the vision of what the future could be. For your final project, you may choose from one of the following options:

- **Critical Analysis/Essay, 5-7 pages:** I would like you to select one or (at most) two texts from the course, and write a critical analysis exploring how the author(s) work across different genres, aesthetics, and/or narrative expectations. You may re-use excerpts from the reading responses you have already submitted.
- **Speculative Fiction.** For this creative project, you can write your own (short) speculative fiction work that develops some of the themes that we've been

discussing in class. If you choose this option, you must also include a **short reflection (300-500 words)** that explains how your video/trailer relates to the course material; you can use this reflection to explain what worked well and what didn't, and what you wish you could have done better if you had the time.

- **Video project.** Similar to the speculative fiction project, you can make a science fictional short or trailer that, again, expresses some of the themes from the class. (If you're not experienced with film or editing, I recommend the iMovie "trailer" option that I used to make the trailer for this class; I know almost nothing about digital media, but it's a pretty user-friendly way to create a piece of short narrative media.) If you choose this option, you must also include a **written reflection (500-900 words)** that explains how your video/trailer relates to the course material; you can use this reflection to explain what worked well and what didn't, and what you wish you could have done better if you had the time.

Office hours/email contact info

I have scheduled office hours via Zoom on Monday and Wednesday from 2-4pm or by appointment. If you cannot make those hours, I can also meet at other times via Zoom or Skype; my Skype handle is **emsuzuki**. Attendance at office hours is not required but highly encouraged, so that I will have a chance to "see" you in person!

You may also contact me by email with questions, concerns, or to set up a personal appointment.

Illness or other contingency

- Ideally, the expanded time frame of this course will allow individuals experiencing mild symptoms to continue to participate. However, if you are experiencing severe symptoms or other hardship, please let me know as soon as possible.
- If you anticipate difficulty with getting regular access to the Internet in ways that will compromise your participation in this course, please reach out to me immediately. All discussions will remain confidential.

Lecture Schedule

All readings should be completed *before* the dates where they appear

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| Week 1 | 3/30 | Introduction |
| Week 2 | 4/7 | David Morley and Kevin Robins, "Techno-Orientalism: Japan Panic" Iyko Day, "The New Jews: Settler Colonialism and the Personification of Capitalism" |
| Week 3 | 4/13 | Reading Response Due: <i>Severance</i> Prologue – Chapter 12 |

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| Week 4 | 4/21 | <i>Severance</i> , Chapter 13 – ending |
| Week 5 | 4/27 | Reading Response Due: <i>Exit West</i> Chapter 1-6 |
| Week 6 | 5/5 | <i>Exit West</i> Chapter 7-12 |
| Week 7 | 5/11 | Reading Response Due: <i>Exhalation</i> , “The Merchant and the Alchemist’s Gate,” “Exhalation” |
| Week 8 | 5/18 | <i>Exhalation</i> , “The Lifecycle of Software Objects,” “The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling” |
| Week 9 | 5/25 | Reading Response Due: <i>Interior Chinatown</i> , Acts I-III |
| Week 10 | 6/2 | <i>Interior Chinatown</i> , Acts IV-V |
| Final | 6/11 | Final Paper Due <u>before midnight</u> |