

ASIAN AMERICAN AFFECT: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF EMOTION
AMST S254 / WGSS S254 / ER&M S326
Yale Summer Session B

Meeting Information

Dates: June 30th to August 1st

Timing: Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:00am to 12:15pm

Location: TBD (in person)

Course Description

This seminar examines Asian American history and culture through the lens of affect. Whether the political demands of revolutionaries and rebels in the 1970s, the broken English of stereotyped Asian immigrants on TV, or the melancholic musings of “cut fruit” diaspora poets, affect—in other words: emotion, or etymologically, the capacity to “move” or be “moved”—generates social constructs around Asian American race, gender, and sexuality. Historically, affect has worked with and through the economic, the political, and the cultural to generate categories including (but not limited to) the orient, the indebted refugee, and the model minority. By studying a range of contemporary cultural representations—across poetry, literature, film, and music—students will consider how Asian Americans reproduce and/or trouble these reductive tropes by exhibiting and embodying their own dis/affective poetics and politics. Example texts and themes include but are not limited to: Yoko Ono, Ocean Vuong, *Crazy Rich Asians*, *Beef*, *Kim's Convenience*, nerds, rave culture, “sad girl music,” and YouTube personalities (nigahiga, Lilly Singh, and Wong Fu Productions).

Instructor

Name: Minh Huynh Vu (any/all)

Contact: minh.vu@yale.edu

Drop-in Hours: TBD

You can always contact me by email. I check my inbox though at erratic times, so please do not worry about specifically when I receive or reply to your message. Generally, please allow for twenty-four hours while awaiting a response. If you do not hear from me by then, my apologies in advance, and do not hesitate to send a quick reminder (and there is no need to be overly polite and apologetic in the follow-up).

For extensions, if you reach out to me at least a week in advance, you will always be granted extra time without question and penalty. But there are always many variables beyond our control, so if you cannot reach out that far in advance, just write to me and we can figure something out. I am quite flexible with due dates so long as you are not exceeding any registrar guidelines.

Assignments

Students will submit a keyword response paper on the assigned reading(s) for each class. For these 250-word reflections, elaborate on one keyword from that day’s reading(s). There are no expectations for what keyword you select; it can be a term that frequently occurs across the text(s), or it can be a sparse one that has nevertheless shaped how you’ve approached the course’s materials and themes. This assignment is intentionally open-ended: Feel free to evaluate

a keyword's analytical purchase, share how it affectively impacted you, conduct a close reading on its situation within the text, etc. Overall, you are not tasked to pin down a clear or correct definition of the keyword. Instead, consider your entry as an invitational gesture to start a conversation. We will share our keywords at the start of each class.

In addition to these weekly response papers, there are two assigned academic essays for the middle and end of the semester. Both assignments are invitations for students to practice close reading skills, and furthermore to situate these textual analyses in interdisciplinary conversation with the course readings:

- a. The midterm essay—four to five pages—is a standard academic paper where students select and close read **one** of the primary sources. There is no need to cite any secondary literature. With this close reading, students will develop argument about how the selected primary source devises its own theory of catastrophic living.
- b. The final essay—eight to ten pages—is a similar assignment which involves close reading and secondary source analysis. But instead of focusing on one primary source, this paper asks students to focus on **two**. In addition, students should cite at least one piece of secondary literature from the syllabus. By juxtaposing these texts, students will identify their similarities and differences through the lens of Asian American affect.

Assessment

Generally, grades will be weighed as such:

20%	Participation
20%	Keyword posts
25%	Midterm essay
35%	Final essay

Altogether, these percentages add up to 100%. However, rather than focus too much on numerical values, I want to emphasize that there are a lot of other more “invisible” factors that I will consider in a more holistic assessment of your final grade. Some of these factors include but are not limited to: effort, improvement, experimentation, collaboration, preparation, etc.

I share this clarification because I am more philosophically committed to qualitative rather than quantitative feedback. After receiving your assignments, my focus is not to evaluate the “validity” or “correctness” of your work. Instead, I seek to simply engage with your research, thinking aloud and alongside your thoughts. Likewise, you will also be carefully and generously reflecting on your own work and that of peers. Together, hopefully we can shift from trying to acquire a “mastery” of knowledge to instead cultivating our curiosity as a collective.

Pedagogical Alignments

These are written as invitational provocations rather than imposed policies—whose etymology originates to the Old French word for the “study or practice of good government” in the cultivation of “civil conduct.”¹ Put simply, I am not interested in policing your methods of engagement through punitive measures such as grade deductions. Instead, I am interested in provisioning what I could gather myself: that this section can simply provide you the intellectual

¹ “policy,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, etymonline.com

tools and interpersonal connections you may need and/or want for the remainder of your undergraduate careers and beyond. In this way, I view pedagogy as a relational practice. As much as this classroom will be shepherded by me as the sanctioned “instructor,” its cultivation will also depend on you as shared interlocutors.

Attendance: Your sustainable engagement with peers and course materials is my guiding concern for the semester. But because this semester is condensed from thirteen to five weeks, “[a]ttendance is required in all Yale Summer Session courses” according to the handbook. Of course, if you “cannot attend a particular class session due to an emergency or serious illness,” just email me in advance and you will receive an excused absence. Unexcused absences will result in deductions in your overall grade (separate from the participation score): for every two, you will receive a deduction of a third of a letter grade (e.g., an A will become an A-).

Accessibility: Indeed, we do have [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#), through which you can register for “a disability-related accommodation or service.” Through SAS, you can receive extra time for exams (though there are none in this class), a peer notetaker, and digital or physical reading aids. At the same time, accessibility is not necessarily synonymous with disability, which furthermore is not simply an individualized condition that needs to be vetted by an institution. Therefore, please do not hesitate to reach out—to me or to the collective class setting—if you require additional accommodations.

Participation: Contrary to how the university inculcates a standard of intellectual comportment, participation goes beyond attending and talking in class. This seminar space welcomes your desired—comfortable and experimental—modes of engagement: active listening, writing reflections, attending drop-in hours, sharing supplemental readings over email, revising your own work, etc.

Academic Dishonesty: Any concerns or cases of academic dishonesty will be discussed between the instructor and student, with thorough review of the respective written materials. If further action is required, the case will be sent to the Executive Committee, which conducts a thorough analysis of the matter.

According to the Yale College handbook, in the case of a humanities course, academic dishonesty includes “plagiarism; unauthorized sharing of materials, answers, or sources; improper acknowledgment of sources in essays; the use of a single essay in more than one course except in academically appropriate circumstances and with the prior explicit permission of the instructors; [and] other means by which a student may create, submit, or take credit for work that is not the student's own.”

Artificial Intelligence: These tools are not prohibited per se, but they are not encouraged—especially with written assignments—since they often hinder the quality of the work. Before collaborating with artificial intelligence on your work for this course, please request permission by sending me a note that describes (a) how you intend to use the tool and (b) how using it will enhance your learning. Any use of AI to complete an

assignment must be acknowledged in a citation that includes the prompt you submitted to the bot, the date of access, and the URL of the program.

Readings and Schedule

All texts will be uploaded on Canvas. There are no requirements in terms of purchasing course materials, but if a particular reading or author resonates, I encourage you to consider purchasing their books for your own library.

Week 1: The Menace

Week 1, Class 1

Primary Sources:

- “A Statue for Our Harbor” (1881): political cartoon
- “What Shall We Do With Our Boys?” (1882): political cartoon
- “The Yellow Terror In All His Glory” (1899): political cartoon
- Jack London, “The Yellow Peril” (1904): essay
- “Trump calls the coronavirus the ‘kung flu’” (2020): presidential speech

Secondary Sources:

- Edward Said, “Introduction” in *Orientalism* (1978)
- Robert Lee, “Yellowface” in *Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (1999)

Week 1, Class 2

Primary Sources:

- “Afong Moy, the Chinese Lady” (1835): lithograph
- Henry Koster, *Flower Drum Song* (1961): film
- David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (1988); play

Secondary Sources:

- Christina Klein, “Sentimental Education: Creating a Global Imaginary of Integration” in *Cold War Orientalism* (2003)
- Anne Anlin Cheng, “The Yellow Woman” in *Ornamentalism* (2019)

Week 2: The Melancholic

Week 2, Class 1

Primary Sources:

- Ocean Vuong, selections from *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous: A Novel* (2019)
- Mitski, “My Love Mine All Mine” (2023)

Secondary Sources:

- Summer Kim Lee, “Staying In: Mitski, Ocean Vuong, and Asian American Asociality” (2019)
- David Eng, “Racial Melancholia: Model Minorities, Depression, and Suicide” in *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (2019)

Week 2, Class 2

Primary Sources:

- Mitski, “Nobody” (2018)
- Michelle Zauner, selections from *Crying in H Mart* (2020)
- Cathy Park Hong, selections from *Minor Feelings* (2020)
- Lee Isaac Chung, *Minari* (2020)
- Wasia Project, “ur so pretty” (2022)

Secondary Sources:

- Anne Anlin Cheng, “The Melancholy of Race” in *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (2000)
- Wen Liu, “Narrating Against Assimilation and the Empire: Diasporic Mourning and Queer Asian Melancholia” (2019)
- Jia Tolentino, “*Minor Feelings* and the Possibilities of Asian-American Identity” (2020)

Week 3: The Comical

Week 3, Class 1: The Comical

Primary Sources:

- Apu Nahasapeemapetilon on *The Simpsons* (1989)
- Mrs. Lee on *Victorious* (2010)
- London Tipton on *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* and *The Suite Life on Deck*

Secondary Sources:

- John Lowe, “Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter, Laughing” (1986)
- Shilpa Davé, “Racial Accents, Hollywood Casting, and Asian American Studies” (2017)

Week 3, Class 2: The Comical

Primary Sources:

- Atsuko Okatsuka, *The Intruder* (2022) Apu Nahasapeemapetilon on *The Simpsons* (1989)
- Ali Wong, *Baby Cobra* (2016)
- Hasan Minhaj, *Patriot Act* (2018)

Secondary Sources:

- Sarah Moon Cassinelli, “‘If we are Asian, then are we funny?’: Margaret Cho’s ‘All-American Girl’ as the First (and Last?) Asian American Sitcom” (2008)
- Caroline Kyungah Hong, “Asian American Comedy and Humor” and “Asian Americans on Television” in *Asian American Culture: From Anime to Tiger Moms* (2016)
- Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai, “Comedy Has Issues” (2017)

Week 4: The Disaffected and Dissatisfied

Week 4, Class 1

Primary Sources:

- Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece* (1964)
- Laurel Nakadate, *Happy Birthday* (2000)

Secondary Sources:

- Vivian Huang, “Inscrutably, actually: hospitality, parasitism, and the silent work of Yoko Ono and Laurel Nakadate” (2018)
- Sunny Xiang, “Coda—the Tone of Commons: Solidarities Without a Solid” in *Tonal Intelligence: The Aesthetics of Asian Inscrutability During the Long Cold War* (2020)

Week 4, Class 2

Primary Sources:

- Eugene Lim, selections from *Dear Cyborgs* (2017)
- Lee Sung Jin, *Beef* (2023)

Secondary Sources:

- Xine Yao, “Coda: Notes toward a Disaffected Manifesto beyond Survival” in *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America* (2021)
- Lauren Berlant, “Life. On Being in Life without Wanting the World: No World Poetics, or, Elliptical Life” in *On the Inconvenience of Other People* (2022)
- Leland Tabares, “Unhappy Asian: Decolonizing the Good Life in Lee Sung Jin’s *Beef*” (2023)

Week 5: The Marginal/Mainstream

Week 5, Class 1

Primary Sources:

- Jon M. Chu, *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018)
- Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

Secondary Sources:

- Sylvia Shin Huey Chong, “What Was Asian American Cinema?” (2017)
- Viet Thanh Nguyen, “Asian-Americans Need More Movies, Even Mediocre Ones” (2018)
- Melissa Phruksachart, “The Bourgeois Cinema of Boba Liberalism” (2020)

Week 5, Class 2

Primary Sources:

- S.937: COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act (2021-2022)
- “Asian and LGBTQ organizations’ statement in opposition to law enforcement based hate crime legislation” (2021-2022)

Secondary Sources:

- Lisa Lowe, “Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique” in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996)
- Dylan Rodríguez, “The ‘Asian exception’ and the Scramble for Legibility: Toward an Abolitionist Approach to Anti-Asian Violence”
- Bao Lo, “Anti-Asian Violence and Abolition Feminism as Asian American Feminist Praxis” (2023)