

**Asian American Film and Fiction**  
**ENGL 217-10**

June 5 – July 7, 2023  
Monday – Thursday, 1:10 PM – 3:15 PM  
Intercultural Center, Room 106

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*You can expect email responses usually within 24 hours on weekdays during business hours.  
I am also happy to meet with students, virtually or in-person, Monday through Thursday **by appointment.***

*“When I hear the phrase ‘Asians are next in line to be white,’ I replace the word ‘white’ with ‘disappear.’ Asians are next in line to disappear. . . We will not be the power but become absorbed by power, not share the power of whites but be stooges to a white ideology that exploited our ancestors.”*

*--Kathy Park Hong, from her book *Minor Feelings**

### **The Argument**

Asian American filmmakers and storytellers have intentionally labored long to create works of art that guard against the erasure that cultural hegemony produces. Their efforts have resulted in films and fiction of great aesthetic value, unique generic quality, and narrative authenticity. These artists have accomplished this within a structure of power that is threatened by the existence of diverse perspectives, an acknowledgement of different lived experience, and even the possibility of social change.

Such a body of work deserves not only recognition but also thoughtful study and understanding of its arguments against essentialist notions of unitary identity and generic rigidity. These arguments ensure that the experience of millions of Americans does not remain peripheral on its way to erasure, but is more accurately positioned as an indispensable element of a fundamental American identity, definition, and experience.

### **The Aspiration**

Your thoughtful study of the films and fictions I have selected will empower you as a consumer (and perhaps even a producer!) to ensure their continued creation. Greater access to film technology has produced an unprecedented variety in movie production, distribution, and exhibition, resulting in greater opportunity for more diverse filmmaking. Competition for entertainment has forced movie makers to allow for more and more audience expectation and influence over artistic production, for good and for ill. As Asian Americans are, categorically, the fastest growing population in America, there is numeric momentum for even more stories and more authentic representation – and perhaps, one day, even actual inclusion of Asian American actors, writers, filmmakers, and producers.

This course can provide you with the tools you need to play a greater role in this narrative revolution.

### **The Approach**

I view the students in this course as co-creators of knowledge, not empty vessels waiting to be filled. I strongly believe that the best way to co-create is through in-class discussions and activities.

Decades of research show that this approach leads to greater student learning and critical thinking skills because discussion is active engagement with the material: whoever is doing the most work during class time is doing the most learning.

But beneficial class discussions and in-class activities are inherently riskier than other passive classroom activities, for both students and professors.

As a student, perhaps you worry that a lack of preparation or gaps in knowledge will embarrass you in front of others if you try to contribute.

As a professor, I may worry that letting go of the material will lead to long, awkward pauses or unpolished communication.

I admit that I don't have all the solutions to these challenges, but I am committed to providing a safe space for all of us to take more risks in pursuit of a significant learning experience.

### The Learning Objectives

*This class will provide you with the opportunity to improve the following **critical thinking skills**:*

- Evaluate your individual emotional and intellectual responses to a film
- Create convincing arguments about a film using your personal opinion and tastes
- Systematically take notes while viewing a film to develop substantial ideas and important questions
- Recognize how filmmakers use cinematic techniques to develop thematic content
- Learn to write a screening report, a movie review, and a critical essay about film
- Make connections between different films
- Make connections between a film and the culture that produced it

*This class will provide you with the opportunity to gain **content knowledge** about the following concepts as they have been considered in the Asian American cinematic tradition:*

Adoption	Discrimination	Incarceration	Racial melancholia
Asian American	Empire	Media	Refugee
Assimilation	Enclave	Memory	Religion
Citizenship	Family	Microaggression	Resistance
Class	Food	Multiracial	Self-loathing
Commodification	Foreign	Nationalism	Stereotype
Community	Gender and sexuality	Performance	Transnationalism
Culture	Identity	Politics	Trauma
Deportation	Immigration	Queer	War

### The Required Viewings

In selecting films for this course, I was obliged to privilege a handful of narratives and genres over many other equally worthy ones. These films were not chosen because they are "representative" of any group or individual experience, but because they are strategically constructed texts which

resist/play with/overtake/embrace the more dominant narratives within which they were constructed. I labored to include a wide range of creators, viewpoints, and technical and thematic elements as I remain committed to practices that foster diversity and inclusion in scholarship as well as in the classroom.

**Film Availability:** While many of these films will be made available on Canvas through Georgetown's ShareStream software, I cannot guarantee all films will be accessible in this way. The viewing of a few films may require subscriptions to viewing platforms like Netflix, PBS, or Vimeo, or may require you to rent a movie for a few dollars on platforms like Google Play or Amazon Prime. **I will try my hardest to ensure these films are made affordable and accessible for all students.**

#### **Early Hollywood:**

- *The Cheat*. Directed by Cecil B. DeMille, performances by Sessue Hayakawa, Fanny Ward, and Jack Dean, Jesse Lasky Feature Plays, 1915.

#### **Early Asian American Film Forms, the Documentary:**

- *Out of State*. Directed by Ciara Lacy, Independent Television Service, Inc., 2019.
- *Bad Axe*. Directed by David Siev, IFC Films, 2022.

#### **Early Asian American Film Forms, the Short Film:**

- *Sa-I-Gu*. Directed by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson and Christine Choy, Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, Elaine H. Kim, and Christine Choy, 1993. (41 min)
- *Breathing Lessons*. Directed by Jessica Yu, Inscrutable Films and Pacific News Service, 1996.
- *Bao*. Directed by Domee Shi, Pixar Animation Studios, 2018. (35 min)
- *Coming Out Using a Time Machine*. Directed by Naman Gupta, performances by Karan Soni, Sangeeta Agrawal, and Raghuram Shetty, The Verve Circle, 2021. (8 min)
- *Si*. Directed by Thomas Kim, performances by Ki Hong Lee and Rollin Atkinson, Thomas Kim and Ashley Chu, 2020. (10 min)
- *Aswang Next Door*, Directed by Bernard Badion, performances by Eugene Cordero and Brynn O'Malley, Terrence Grant, 2017. (5 min)

#### **Independent Feature Length Film Movement:**

- *Better Luck Tomorrow*. Directed by Justin Lin, performances by Parry Shen, John Cho, Jason Tobin, Sung Kang, Roger Fan, and Karin Anna Cheung, MTV Films, 2003.
- *Advantageous*. Directed by Jennifer Phang, performances by Jacqueline Kim, Samantha Kim, and Freya Adams, Good Neighbors Media, 2015.

#### **Transnational Cinema:**

- *Kung Fu Hustle*. Directed by Stephen Chow, performances by Stephen Chow, Danny Chan, Yuen Wah, Yuen Qiu, Siu-Lung Leong, Huayi Brothers (China) & Columbia TriStar Film Distributors (International), 2004.

#### **Mucking About Mainstream Genres and Narratives:**

- *The Big Sick*, Directed by Michael Showalter, performances by Kumail Nanjiani and Zoe Kazan, Apatow Productions, 2017.
- *The Half of It*. Directed by Alice Wu, performances by Leah Lewis, Daniel Diemer, and Alexis Lemire, Likely Story, 2020.
- *The Blue Bayou*, Directed by Justin Chon, performances by Justin Chon, Alicia Vikander, Sydney Kowalske, Linh-Dan Pham, and Mark O'Brien, Entertainment One, 2021.

\*While the viewing of the following film is not included in the course schedule, you will need to be familiar with it in order to write the final exam essay:

- *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, performances by Michelle Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan, Stephani Hsu, Jamie Lee Curtis, and James Hong, IAC Films, Gozie AGBO, Year of the Rat, and Ley Line Entertainment, 2022.

### **The Required Secondary Readings (posted on Canvas)**

- Lowe, Lisa. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Differences." *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Duke University Press, 1998, pp. 60-83.
- Xing, Jun. "A Cinema in the Making." *Asian America Through the Lens: History, Representations, and Identity*. AltaMira Press, 1998, pp. 31-52.
- Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*. Pearson Education, 2015, pp. 38-85.
- Li Yao, and Harvey Nicholson, Jr. "When 'model minorities' become 'yellow peril': Othering and the racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 pandemic." *Sociology Compass*. 16 January 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12849>
- Yu, Charles. "Act I" from *Interior Chinatown*. Vintage Contemporaries, 2020, pp. 1-30.
- Nguyen, Viet Thanh. Excerpt from *The Sympathizer*. Grove Press, 2015, pp. 125-134.

### **The Class Policies**

There are two policies to which I will hold both myself and students who participate in this class.

1. **Always display respect for narratives, ideas, and identities.** This class will incorporate concepts of participatory learning, cooperation, democracy, equality, and unity of theory and practice. I am committed to creating a learning environment for students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.).

As I expect students in this class to make connections between the texts we are studying and their own life experiences, opinions, or attitudes, classmates will thus be required to respect the contributions of others. This includes giving other students (and the professor) the benefit of the doubt if they misspeak or make mistakes that may offend. Everyone's opinion deserves to be respected, understood, and even challenged in appropriate ways. If you find that you are ever uncomfortable in class, please first reach out to me and together we can, as Gayatri Spivak encourages, "begin to investigate what it is that silences you."

2. **Always display academic integrity.** This includes avoiding practices such as plagiarism, cheating on assignments, contract cheating, using false citations, or submitting work for multiple purposes.

**Remember that plagiarism not only steals from others, but citation and attribution ensure that no scholar's voice is silenced, that academia remains a place where marginalized perspectives and voices can take part in the conversation and not be censored by elision.**

The Georgetown Honor Code states the following about plagiarism:

“Plagiarism, in any of its forms, and whether intentional or unintentional, violates standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one’s own the ideas or writings of another (see “What is Plagiarism?”). While different academic disciplines have different modes for attributing credit, all recognize and value the contributions of individuals to the general corpus of knowledge and expertise. Students are responsible for educating themselves as to the proper mode of attributing credit in any course or field. Faculty may use various methods to assess the originality of students’ work. For example, faculty may submit a student’s work to electronic search engines, including Turnitin.com, a service to which the Honor Council and the Provost subscribe. Note that plagiarism can be said to have occurred without any affirmative showing that a student’s use of another’s work was intentional.”

Please click on the link below for more information on the other forms of cheating mentioned above.  
<https://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/system/policies/standards-of-conduct/>

### The Evaluation of Coursework

You will be asked to demonstrate different ways of viewing, reading, thinking, and writing about Asian American identity and experience. You will analyze films and texts as specific productions of knowledge and discourse through attention to form, content, and context. Your success in completing these tasks will be evaluated through the following low- and high-stakes learning opportunities and final grade percentages:

In-class attendance, participation, and weekly quizzes: 40%  
Film analysis journal, screening report, and movie review: 40%  
Final exam essay: 20%

**Participation Policy:** This course is primarily discussion-based, so classroom participation is vital to successful student learning. At the end of each class period, **students will evaluate their own inclass participation** (according to a rubric that will be provided) and making a case for their daily grade.

In a discussion-based classroom, participation grades are tied to both attendance and to the timely submission of homework: hence, if you are absent you can’t participate, and your participation will be hampered if you haven’t finished the homework for that class meeting. My attendance and late-work policies, outlined below, are in place to ensure that you can earn a successful participation grade.

**Attendance Policy:** I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. You can miss up to **two class periods** with no grade penalty, but you will need to make up whatever classwork was missed. Please be frugal with these absences. After the second absence, your **final grade will be dropped a third of a grade** for each additional session you miss.

As per Georgetown’s religious observance policy, please notify me in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that may conflict with your attendance.

**Late Work Policy:** Even though I do recognize that life happens, it is also a reality that summer courses proceed quite briskly, so it is vital to your success that you keep up with the workload. I do allow students to request a **one-day extension** for writing homework **twice** during the semester, apart from the final exam essay.

**Workload Expectations:** Homework for this course consists of reading articles, viewing films, keeping a film analysis journal, and writing a screening report and a movie review.

You can expect to spend a **minimum** of six to eight hours per week of independent learning outside of class. Because class is held daily, Monday through Thursday, **you will be required to spend some time on homework every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday after class** in addition to time spent on other days of the week.

Once a week, on Thursdays at the beginning of class, students will take an in-class quiz. These quizzes consist of three short-answer questions which will review the technique, content, and context of the films discussed earlier that week.

The final exam is a short essay exam that will be taken during class on the last day of class, Thursday, July 6. It will be an evaluation of the skills in reading, viewing, and writing that you have been developing during the semester.

### **Academic Resources**

**I am absolutely committed to your success in my course. Please communicate directly and immediately with me if you are having trouble in the course for any reason.**

I believe that accessibility is important for each student in our class, whether it be dealing with difficulty speaking up in group settings, mental health issues, or a specific learning challenge that has or has not been identified by professionals.

If you feel you are facing a barrier to either success or access in this course, please note the following resources available to help you.

1. If you feel that you are struggling with the coursework itself, particularly the writing requirements, please visit the Georgetown Writing Center. Trained peer tutors are available to help you at any stage of the writing process, offering assistance with specific assignments or improving your general writing skills. Please make an appointment with the Center's capable and helpful writing tutors at this website: <https://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>
2. If you have a specific disability which will make it difficult for you to complete your work for the course, please visit Georgetown's Academic Resource Center for disability support accommodations, a variety of academic supports including academic workshops or one-on-one learning meetings, and student-athlete support: <https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/>. The following paragraph describes your rights and responsibilities in accessing various learning accommodations:

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Some accommodations might include note takers, books on tape, extended time on assignments, and interpreter services among others. Students are responsible for communicating their needs to the [Academic Resource Center](#), the office that oversees disability support services, (202-6878354; [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu); <https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/disability/>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate

accommodations. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared their disabilities and have not requested an accommodation in a timely manner. Also, the University need not modify course or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction. For the most current and up-to-date policy information, please refer to the [Georgetown University Academic Resource Center website](#). Students are highly encouraged to discuss the documentation and accommodation process with an Academic Resource Center administrator.

3. There is also excellent mental health support available through Georgetown’s Mental Health, Wellness, and Health Care website: <https://www.georgetown.edu/mental-health-and-telehealthresources/>.
4. Finally, if you are struggling with a university-related issue but don’t know where to turn, please contact the Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO). The OSO is a confidential and safe space that is independent of formal university organizations or structures where students can discuss their concerns, share their experiences, ask questions and explore their options. The Ombuds can help problem-solve, identify goals, and empower you to think through ways to navigate complex situations.

Some reasons for you to visit OSO may be to address academic concerns, clarify administrative policies, discuss interpersonal conflicts, seek coaching, mediation or facilitation to handle a sensitive situation, receive advice on the process to file a formal complaint if you are experiencing bias, harassment, bullying or other forms of intimidation, identify other appropriate campus resources, and allow you to safely express your frustrations and concerns.

Request an in-person or zoom appointment with Dr. Daniela Brancaforte, Main Campus Student Ombuds, by writing [studentombuds@georgetown.edu](mailto:studentombuds@georgetown.edu) or calling 202-784-1081. Find more information at [studentombuds.georgetown.edu](http://studentombuds.georgetown.edu).

*As this course is an evolving experience, the syllabus may evolve as well. I reserve the right to make any changes to the syllabus as I see fit. These changes will be clearly communicated to the class, both orally and in writing.*

### The Course Schedule

<b>Monday 6/5</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To get to know classmates and the professor, to understand the syllabus, to preview the course texts, to create a claim-and-evidence-based argument
<b>Class Work:</b> Intros, Syllabus Quiz, Syllabus Overview Activity: “Are You More Like . . . ?”: review of argument construction
<b>Homework: Reading:</b> “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity,” Lisa Lowe
<b>Tuesday 6/6</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the challenges to pan-ethnic and ethnic identity formation and the historical, ideological, and material diversity of “Asian Americans”

<p><b>Class Work:</b> Discussion: What is “Asian American?” Lecture: American Film Tradition</p>
<p><b>Homework: Reading:</b> “Chapter One: A Cinema in the Making,” Jun Xing</p>
<p><b>Wednesday 6/7</b></p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the challenges and distinctions of establishing an “Asian American” cinematic tradition</p>
<p><b>Class Work:</b> Discussion: Asian American Film Tradition Activity: One of these films not like the other ones: creating a cinematic canon</p>
<p><b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> <i>The Cheat</i> (1 hr 6 min)</p>
<p><b>Thursday 6/8</b></p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the purposes of early American cinema and the possibility of artistic agency within institutional racism</p>
<p><b>Class Work:</b> Week One Quiz (3 short answer questions) Discussion of <i>The Cheat</i> Activity: The zombies are coming!: silent film as model of American assimilation</p>
<p><b>Homework: Reading:</b> “Film Terms and Topics for Film Analysis and Writing,” Tim Corrigan</p>
<p><b>Monday 6/12</b></p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand film techniques and how filmmakers use them to organize narratives, present themes, embrace aesthetics, and render moral and value judgments</p>
<p><b>Class Work:</b> Discussion/Application/Kahoot Quiz: Coming to Terms with Film Terms</p>
<p><b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> <i>Out of State</i> (56 minutes)</p>
<p><b>Tuesday 6/13</b></p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the relationship between colonialism, incarceration, and for-profit prisons; the unhappy union of Pacific Islander and Asian American political identities</p>
<p><b>Class Work:</b> Discussion: <i>Out of State</i> Activity: Something ain’t right here: creating a social justice documentary</p>
<p><b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> Begin <i>Bad Axe</i> (1 hr 40 min)</p>
<p><b>Wednesday 6/14</b></p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the beginnings of the Asian American documentary tradition and its complicated roots in public media; the marginalization of representative film; learn how to write a film screening report</p>
<p><b>Class Work:</b> Lecture/Discussion: Definitions and Difficulties of Documentary Filmmaking Activity: Turning Notes on a Film into a Film Screening Report</p>
<p><b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> Finish <i>Bad Axe</i></p>



<b>Thursday 6/15</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the ethics of documentary making; the role antiblackness or colorism plays in the fluidity of the “good Asian/bad Asian” paradigm
<b>Class Work:</b> Week Two Quiz (3 short answer questions) Discussion: <i>Bad Axe</i> Activity: Why so narrow?: from ‘model minority’ to ‘yellow peril’
<b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> 6 Short Films: (total of 2 hours of viewing)
<b>Writing:</b> Film Screening Report on one of the short films (500-600 words)
<b>Monday 6/19: No class in observance of Juneteenth</b>
<b>Tuesday 6/20</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the qualitative and quantitative differences between short films and feature films and the role they have played in the Asian American film tradition
<b>Class Work:</b> Discussion: Short Film Genre; Short Films
<b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> Begin <i>Better Luck Tomorrow</i> (1 hr 41 min)
<b>Wednesday 6/21</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the differences between independent and mainstream cinema and the co-opting of independent film; learn how to write a film review
<b>Class Work:</b> Lecture: Independent Films and Mainstream Hollywood Activity: How to Write a Film Review
<b>Homework: Viewing and Analysis:</b> Finish <i>Better Luck Tomorrow</i>
<b>Thursday 6/22</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the relationship between independent film, the resistance to oppressive racial and gendered stereotypes, and the finding of an artistic voice; the model minority myth and the myth of cultural inclusion
<b>Class Work:</b> Week Three Quiz (3 short answer questions) Discussion: <i>Better Luck Tomorrow</i>
<b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> <i>Advantageous</i> (1 hr 30 min)
<b>Reading:</b> “Act I” from <i>Interior Chinatown</i> , Charles Yu
<b>Monday 6/26</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the genre of science fiction and to what uses it can be put; the sacrifices required for immigrants to compete and the intergenerational misunderstandings and anxieties these sacrifices produce; institutionalized gender bias toward females
<b>Class Work:</b> Discussion: <i>Advantageous</i> Activity: Stories I’d like to have told: creating an independent film
<b>Homework: Viewing and Analysis:</b> Begin <i>Kung Fu Hustle</i> (1 hr 39 min)

<b>Tuesday 6/27</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the Hong Kong cinematic tradition, its appearance in Hollywood, and the doors that it opened and closed for Asian American filmmakers and actors
<b>Class Work:</b> Lecture: Hong Kong Cinematic Tradition Discussion of "Act I" from <i>Interior Chinatown</i>
<b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> Finish <i>Kung Fu Hustle</i>
<b>Wednesday 6/28</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand what transnational cinema is and is not and the effect such a cinematic tradition has had on contemporary filmmakers around the world; the differences between an Asian American and an Asian identity in cinematic production, distribution, and exhibition
<b>Class Work:</b> Discussion: <i>Kung Fu Hustle</i> Activity: Hong Kong cinema in Hollywood: Keanu Reeves is Asian?!?
<b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> <i>The Big Sick</i> (2 hours)
<b>Thursday 6/29</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand the existence of Bollywood on the development of a South Asian American film tradition; the issues of representation, accessibility, culture, and stereotyping that are unique for South Asian Americans; the intergenerational trauma of immigration; interracial dating and cultural values
<b>Class Work:</b> Week Four Quiz (3 short answer questions) Discussion: <i>The Big Sick</i> and South Asian American Representation
<b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> <i>The Half of It</i> (1 hr 44 min)
<b>Writing:</b> A film review on one of the films viewed (600-750 words)
<b>Monday 7/3</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To better understand contemporary production, distribution, and exhibition vis-a-vis SVOD and TVOD viewing models like Netflix, Hulu, etc.; the construction and interplay between sexuality and race and their role in meddling with heterosexual romantic comedies; the co-opting of European narratives by Asian American filmmakers to tell more inclusive stories
<b>Class Work:</b> Discussion: <i>The Half of It</i> Activity: "Crazy Romantic Asian Americans:" noticing trends, making spaces
<b>Homework: Viewing &amp; Analysis:</b> <i>Blue Bayou</i> (2 hrs)
<b>Reading:</b> Short excerpt from <i>The Sympathizer</i>
<b>Tuesday 7/4: No class in observance of Independence Day</b>
<b>Wednesday 7/5</b>
<b>Learning Objectives:</b> To understand why the relationship between American war and empire building in Southeast Asia and cross-cultural adoptions, criminalization, and deportations are often absent in discussions about Asian American life; the hybridization of genres and the responsibilities of telling other people's stories

**Class Work:** Discussion: *Blue Bayou*  
Activity: Preparation for the final exam essay

**Homework:** Prepare for the final exam essay

**Thursday 7/6**

**Learning Objectives:** Complete final exam essay

**Class Work: FINAL EXAM ESSAY**