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## English 98r Junior Tutorial

### The Art of Minor Feelings: Asian American Emotional Lives in Contemporary Literature



Arnold Genthe, “The Street of the Gamblers” in San Francisco’s Chinatown c. 1898

**Course description:** Since their arrival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Asians in America have been treated as unassimilable foreign threats (the Yellow Peril) but also idealized as upwardly mobile American citizens (model minorities). Much of the discourse around these stereotypes focus heavily on the perceived emotional lives of Asian Americans—that they are inscrutable, robotic, and even unfeeling. Asian American intellectuals and artists have responded by disclaiming or reworking these prescriptions. Recently, the poet and essayist Cathy Park Hong argues that Asian Americans experience a “racialized range of emotions”—what she calls “minor feelings”—when their concerns about racial injustice are repeatedly dismissed as inconsequential. What do emotions have to do with Asian American history and identity? And how do we talk about emotions critically?

This junior tutorial revolves around the cultural history of affect for Asian Americans in a variety of contemporary literary works by Asian Americans since the 90s including essays, short stories, novels, and genre fiction. Over the course of the semester, we will learn to understand and critically analyze affect—or feelings and emotions—in ways that are not just psychic and personal but also embodied and socially, politically, and historically specific. We will examine different affective states (e.g., anger, disgust, and detachment but also the beautiful and joyous), considering how specific affects have contributed to the stereotyping of Asian Americans. More importantly, we will explore how Asian Americans themselves have used affects to challenge and exceed the

categorizations that have been laid out for them. Beginning with the history of how Asians were racialized in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the birth of “Asian American” as a term during the Civil Rights Era, we will move into the ways that gender and sexuality have complicated conversations around Asian American emotionality. We will conclude with a series of works in a “postrace” era that seemingly eschew the particularities of racial difference by representing emotions as impersonal and even universal.

This course will also help guide you toward proposing, revising, and completing an extended 20-25 page research paper. We will familiarize ourselves with various scholarly approaches to the study of literature, reading foundational works in Asian American studies & affect theory that intersect with scholarship in history, psychoanalysis, feminist and queer studies, economics, philosophy, and cultural studies. By the end of the course students will:

- + Survey key works of Asian American literature from the 19<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries
- + Be able to identify and participate in major debates in Asian American literary studies
- + Explore the relationship between affect and Asian American literature
- + Understand how affect is socially, politically, and historically specific
- + Learn a range of scholarly methodologies relevant to literary study
- + Identify secondary sources and place them into productive conversation with primary sources
- + Write a 20-25 page literary research paper that makes an original scholarly intervention

### Assignments

- + **Weekly secondary source outlines:** Each week, you will be expected to provide a basic outline that identifies the argument, academic discipline/field, and scholarly intervention of each secondary source that has been assigned. You will also be expected to write 3-5 sentences on how you think the secondary source relates to the primary text we are reading that week.
- + **Short 5-7 page paper** that close reads a literary work and incorporates a secondary source of literary criticism. The secondary source can be one that is on the syllabus, or one that you have chosen yourself. *Due Week 5*
- + **Prospectus and annotated bibliography** 2-3 page prospectus and an annotated list of 8-10 secondary sources that tentatively outline your research topic and the sources you will be consulting for your final paper. *Due Week 8*
- + **Three mini-assignments** that will help you build toward your final paper (see course schedule for more information). *Due Weeks 3, 6, 10*
- + **20-25 page research paper** *Full draft due Week 12; Final draft due Reading Week*
- + **Mandatory Junior Tutorial general meetings & meeting with the Departmental Writing Fellow** (ungraded) *Dates TBD*
- + **Junior Tutorial Conference:** Five-minute presentation on your final paper, to be delivered to all junior tutorial students at the end of the semester (ungraded) *Due Reading Week*

### Grade breakdown

- + Attendance and participation – 10%

- + Weekly secondary source outlines - 10%
- + Short 5-7 page paper - 10%
- + Mini-assignments - 10%
- + Prospectus and annotated bibliography - 10%
- + Final paper draft - 10%
- + Final paper - 40%

### Required course texts

- + Jade Snow Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950)
- + Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings* (2020)
- + Don Lee, *Yellow* (2001)
- + Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019)
- + Fae Myenne Ng, *Bone* (1993)
- + Jenny Zhang, *Sour Heart* (2017)
- + Shaun Tan, *The Arrival* (2006)
- + Ken Liu, *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* (2016)
- + Lysley Tenorio, *Monstress* (2012)

**Note:** Additional readings (including excerpts and secondary sources) will be available on Canvas as PDF files.

### Recommended texts:

- + Joseph Bizup & Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Lessons in Clarity & Grace 12<sup>th</sup> edition* (2016)
- + Eric Hayot, *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities* (2014)
- + Leitch et. al, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism Third Edition* (2018), "Introduction to Theory & Criticism" and "Alternative Table of Contents"
- + Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: The Complete Guide* (2017)

**Note:** These guides provide clear advice on academic writing and a basic introduction to literary theory. While we will be discussing these topics during our seminar, you may find these books helpful to keep on hand, especially if you will be writing a senior thesis or plan to pursue graduate school in the humanities.

### Course Schedule:

#### Unit One: On the Origins of Asian American Emotional Lives

In this introductory unit, we will learn about the formation and institutionalization of Asian American studies and Asian American literature. We will consider how "Yellow Peril" and "model minority" discourse shape the language of feelings and emotions around Asian American identity and explore affect theory's roots in aesthetics, psychoanalysis, and cultural criticism. In the last week, we will situate affect theory within a major debate in Asian American studies: whether literature should concentrate on "aesthetics" or "politics."

## Week One | The Yellow Peril & Oppositional Politics

### Primary readings:

- + Frank Chin et al. *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974), preface to the First Edition and preface to the 1991 Edition
- + Philip P. Choy et. al, *The Coming Man: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Perceptions of the Chinese* (1994), selection of political cartoons
- + Roger Shimomura, selected paintings and prints
- + Jade Snow Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950), Chapters 1-3 and skim the rest

### Secondary readings:

- + Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (2009), “Introduction: From Heart Mountain to Hanoi” and “Chapter 1: Before Asian America” [Methodology: Historicism]
- + Long Le-Khac and Kate Hao, *Post45 x Journal of Cultural Analytics*, "[The Asian American Literature We've Constructed](#)" (2021) [Methodology: Digital humanities]
- + *Time to Say Goodbye* podcast episode "[Ethnic Studies, Revolutionary Politics, and the Third World Liberation Front with Viet Thanh Nguyen](#)" [Methodology: Literary & intellectual history]

*Optional:* Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (2016), Introduction & “Chapter 17: The ‘Rise of Asian Americans’? Myths and Realities” [Methodology: Historicism]

## Week Two | Model Minority Asian Americans & Psychoanalytic Frameworks

### Primary readings:

- + Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020)

### Secondary readings:

- + Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), “Introduction: Feel Your Way” and “Chapter 2: The Organisation of Hate” [Methodology: Affect theory, cultural studies]
- + Sigmund Freud, “Mourning & Melancholia” (1918) [Methodology: psychoanalysis]
- + David L. Eng & Shinhee Han, “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia” in *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader* (2010) [Methodology: psychoanalysis]

### *Optional:*

- + *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis* (2014)
- + Matthew Shen Goodman, n+1 Issue 39: Take Care (Winter 2021), "[American Accomplice](#)" [Response to Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings*]

## Week Three | Racial Paranoia and the (Absent)? Asian American Body

### Primary readings:

- + Don Lee, “Yellow” (2001)
- + Weike Wang, *The New Yorker*, "[Omakase](#)" (2018) and "[The Trip](#)" (2019)

**Secondary readings:**

- + Min Hyoung Song, *The Children of 1965: On Writing, and Not Writing, as an Asian American* (2013), “Introduction: ‘We All Have Our Reasons’ ” [Methodology: Literary history, aesthetics]
- + Jane Hu, *The New Yorker*, [“The ‘Inscrutable’ Voices of Asian-Anglophone Fiction”](#)
- + Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2004), “Chapter 7: paranoia” [Methodology: Affect theory, cultural studies, media studies, aesthetics]

**Mini-assignment #1:** Find a previous essay written for an English literature class that you are especially proud of. Exchange essays with a classmate, making a reverse outline of their essay (how it is structured). Be prepared to present your findings to the class.

**Week Four | Politics vs. Aesthetics in Asian American Literature**

**Primary readings:**

- + Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), Parts I & II

**Secondary readings:**

- + Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993), “Introduction: Constructing an Asian American Textual Coalition” [Methodology: Literary history and aesthetics]
- + Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (2016), “Just Memory” and “Just Forgetting” [Methodology: Historicism, trauma studies, cultural studies]
- + Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999), selections [Methodology: Aesthetics, philosophy, literary & intellectual history]

*Optional:* Rocío G. Davis and Sue-Im Lee, *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writing* (2006), “Introduction: The Aesthetic in Asian American Literary Discourse” [Methodology: Literary history and aesthetics]

**Unit Two: Gendering Asian American Emotions**

In this unit, we will consider how gender and sexuality inflect emotions and emotionality for Asian Americans who have been marginalized by their migration history, legal status, and economic class.

**Week Five | Historical Trauma, Queer Joy**

**Primary readings:**

- + Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), Part III

**Secondary readings:**

- + Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” (1988) [Methodology: Gender studies, poststructuralism]
- + Alvin Eng et. al, *Q&A: Queer in Asian America* (2018), “Introduction: Q&A: Notes on a Queer Asian America” [Methodology: Queer studies, intellectual history, cultural studies]

**DUE: Short 5-7 page paper.** (You may incorporate a weekly secondary source outline into this paper if you choose).

### Week Six | Immigrant Debt, Immigrant Guilt

#### Primary readings:

- + Fae Myenne Ng, *Bone* (1993)

#### Secondary readings:

- + Yoonmee Chang, *Writing the Ghetto: Class, Authorship, and the Asian American Ethnic Enclave* (2010), "Introduction: The Asian American Ghetto" [Methodology: Historicism, literary history, economics]
- + erin Khuê Ninh, *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature* (2011), introduction [Methodology: Gender studies, psychoanalysis, political economy]

**Mini-assignment #2: Mandatory in-class library session.** Come to our library session with a text/topic you would like to practice researching during our library session, ideally one that you might write on for your final paper. This text/topic can be on the syllabus (if this is the case, you may want to read ahead in our class) or one that you select on your own (please consult with me before you proceed).

### Week Seven | Disgust & the Maternal Body

#### Primary readings:

- + Jenny Zhang, *Sour Heart* (2017), selections; *Rookie*, ["The Importance of Angsty Art" \(2013\)](#); ["Hello, Darkness" \(2014\)](#)
- + Joey Bui, "Black Beans and Wine" (2019)

#### Secondary readings:

- + Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949) [Methodology: Psychoanalysis, poststructuralism]
- + Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), "Chapter 1: Approaching Abjection" [Methodology: Gender studies, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism]

**Individual office hours meetings on the text/topic you would like to write your final research paper on.**

### Unit Three: Generic Feelings and the "Postrace" Era

In our final unit, we will examine a series of contemporary literary & multimedia works that often eschew explicit discussions of Asian American racial difference, speaking "generically" about feelings of detachment and disaffection, joy and hope. We will think about how these affective states respond to the twinned forces of capitalism and technological innovation in a rapidly globalizing world and how, rather than simply being "universal," they speak to Asian American identity in ways that stretch beyond biological difference.

## Week Eight | Economic Subjects & Feeling Capitalism

### Primary readings:

- + Shaun Tan, *The Arrival* (2006)

### Secondary readings:

- + Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form & American Literature, 1893-1945* (2009), Introduction and Chapter 1 [Methodology: Historicism, materialism, political economy]
- + Jeffrey Santa Ana, *Racial Feelings: Asian America in a Capitalist Culture of Emotion* (2015), "Introduction: Asian America & Racial Feelings" [Methodology: Affect theory, political economy, cultural studies]

*Optional:* *Time to Say Goodbye* podcast episode "[Iyko Day: On Asians as Capital](#)" [Methodology: Historicism, materialism, political economy]

**DUE: Prospectus with annotated bibliography.** Please come to class ready to report on:

- 1) The secondary research you have done
- 2) How it relates to the text you are writing on
- 3) A tentative argument about your own scholarly intervention

## Week Nine | Techno-Orientalism & Asian American Speculative Fiction

*Guest visit by Dr. Cecilia Mancuso*

### Primary readings:

- + Watch: [Advantageous](#) (2015) on Netflix
- + Ken Liu, *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* (2016), selections

### Secondary readings:

- + Betsy Huang et. al, Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History & Media, "Technologizing Orientalism: An Introduction"
- + Christopher T. Fan, *Post45*, "[Melancholy Transcendence: Ted Chiang and Asian American Postracial Form](#)" (2014) [Methodology: Poststructuralism, historicism, literary and intellectual history]

*Optional:* Christopher T. Fan, *Post45*, "[Asian/American \(Anti-\)Bodies: An Introduction](#)" AND skim one essay of your choice from the cluster: [Methodology: Poststructuralism, literary and intellectual history, cultural studies]

## Week Ten | Popular Culture, Transnational Intimacies

### Primary readings:

- + Lysley Tenorio, *Monstress* (2012), selections

**Secondary readings:**

- + José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), “Introduction: Performing Disidentifications” [Methodology: Queer theory, performance studies, cultural studies]
- + Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), “Chapter Four: Melancholic Migrants” [Methodology: Affect theory, cultural studies]

*Optional:* José Esteban Muñoz, “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position” (2006) [Methodology: Affect theory, queer theory, performance studies]

**Mini-assignment #3:** Please come to class with a full outline of your final paper

**Week Eleven | Fandom & K-pop’s Intimate Industries**

**Primary readings:**

- + Watch: BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan), selection of YouTube & VLive clips
- + Watch: *New Yorker* video [“Why U.S. Audiences Are Crazy For K-pop”](#) (2020)

**Secondary readings:**

- + Hark Joon Lee and Dal Yong Jin, *K-Pop Idols: Popular Culture & the Emergence of the Korean Music Industry* (2019), “Part I: Emergence of K-pop” [Methodology: Media studies; participant observation]
- + Explore aspects of fandom by choosing 2-3 of these sites & articles to browse:
  - o [Bangtan Scholars](#)
  - o [BTS ARMY Census](#) (2020)
  - o *New Yorker*, [“K-Pop Fans Defuse Racist Hashtags”](#) (2020)
  - o [The Rhizomatic Revolution Review](#)
  - o *Variety*, [“How BTS and Its ARMY Could Change the Music Industry”](#) (2020)
  - o Weverse Magazine, [“Fans, their voyage in the room”](#) (2021)

**Week Twelve | Final paper workshop**

*No new readings; we will hold an in-class peer review workshop on your final drafts*

**DUE: Full essay draft.** You can expect full comments from me within a week.

**Week Thirteen | Asian American Feelings Today**

**Primary readings:**

- + Re-read Frank Chin et al. *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974), preface

**DUE READING WEEK: Final papers & Junior Tutorial Conference presentation**

**Course policies**

**Attendance & participation:** Weekly attendance and active participation are essential to a successful seminar. Please arrive to each class on time and be ready to discuss the readings with

your classmates. You are allowed **one excused absence** over the course of the semester. Excessive unexcused absences will negatively impact your final grade for the course.

**Laptops & phones:** Laptops and phones are allowed during seminar only if they are absolutely necessary for accessing the course materials.

**Assignment due dates:** Assignments are due on the dates listed on the syllabus. Late assignments will be docked 1/3 letter grade a day. Failure to turn in the final research paper on time will result in an “F” for the course. Keep in mind that the Junior Tutorial board does not encourage extensions for the final paper unless there are extenuating circumstances: please speak to me far in advance of the due date if you think you may need additional time.

**Contacting me:** You are welcome to contact me with questions or for additional help outside of class via my **weekly office hours** or through **e-mail**. Please note that I do not give writing feedback over e-mail; you may bring up to two double-spaced pages of your writing to my office hours for a brief workshopping session.

**Academic honesty & collaboration:** You are more than encouraged to collaborate with others over the course content and assignments. However, all individual assignments must reflect your own work and all outside sources (including content from seminar discussions)! must be properly cited. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course. If you have any doubts about the academic integrity of an assignment, please speak to me *before* you submit it.

**Accommodations for students with disabilities:** “Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the [Accessible Education Office](#) (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.”