Global Hong Kong in Literature and Film

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Overview

Hong Kong holds a unique place in contemporary world culture due to its hybrid identity as part of an ancient, continuous civilization (China) while also being a cosmopolitan, multicultural crossroads and a center of world trade and finance. Because of this status, it has functioned symbolically as a portal to China for outside cultures since the age of imperialism, while all the while it struggles internally to define its own identity. Its diverse population embodies the postcolonial global south.

This course examines Hong Kong’s evolving and many-faceted character through the lens of literature and film, both looking from the outside (English-language novels and films) and from the inside via local fiction, poetry, and film in English translation. Instead of looking at external representations and internal expressions separately, this course views the image of Hong Kong as a global conversation, in which internal and external voices influence each other both through tension and harmony. That is, what may often be dismissed as “Hollywood fantasy” or commercial fiction are put on the same playing field as serious local culture and viewed comparatively in their participation in an evolving global conversation about what Hong Kong is.

Requirements

There will be an examination on the basic facts of Hong Kong’s history and culture, graded student reader/viewer response assignments on each reading and film, and a final assignment that can take the form of an analytical essay on one or more literary works or films, or an in-class presentation of at 10-20 minutes in length. These final projects shall be based on individual or group research on any contemporary form of cultural expression that creates or contributes to an image of Hong Kong, preferably including field research within the city on exhibitions, performances, architecture or entertainment and consumer culture that can be interpreted in this manner.

I. Historical Memory, Chinese Identity and Imperialism
   b. Somerset Maugham novel (1925) and Greta Garbo film (1934) “The Painted Veil” (1934; 2006)
   c. Film: Stanley Kwan, “Rouge” (1986) (based on a novel by the Hong Kong author Lilian Lee, also author of “Farewell My Concubine”)
   d. Novel and film: James Clavell, Tai-Pan
e. Esther M. K. Cheung, “THE HI/STORIES OF HONG KONG”

II. Post-war Glamor, Love
b. Han Suyin novel “A Many-Splendored Thing” (1952); Film “Love is a Many-Splendored Thing,” dir (1955)
c. James Bond in Hong Kong: “You Only Live Twice” (1967) and “The Man with the Golden Gun” (1974)

III. Hong Kong as Exemplar of the Global Postmodern
c. Poetry: Cheung, Esther M.K, City at the End of Time: Poems by Leung Ping-kwan