



READ
WATCH
THINK

BLOCK 3
GENDER & FEMINISM IN ASIA

PA250 Topics in Asian Studies

Block 3 Gender and Feminism in Asia

How have writers and filmmakers across Asia told stories about gender, identity, and power? In this course, we explore literary, cinematic, and performative works from China, Korea, Japan, and Thailand that portray, imagine, and critically intervene in the lived realities of gendered existence through shifting configurations of sexuality, love, desire, body, family, and nation. What does it mean to live, perceive, and create as a gendered being? Is gender a theme, an act of activism, a positionality of the artist, or a lens of interpretation? Is it constructed, material, or performed? Are literary and cinematic depictions of gender and desire liberating, confining, or mobilizing—and where, finally, lies the line between creation and consumption?

Our discussions will engage with narrative and cinematic techniques, the interplay between text and context, and the mutual shaping of history and fiction. Through close reading and viewing, we will ask how cultural works challenge and redefine the norms of womanhood, beauty, gender, and representation. We will also consider ethical and philosophical questions about subjectivity, agency, and power, and reflect on the limits and possibilities of storytelling itself—how art is simultaneously constrained by socio-discursive conditions, yet capable of breaking through to imagine new ways of being.

Instructor: Mengqi “Mercy” An, Ph.D.

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Regular class meetings: 9:30 AM - 12:00 PM, Tutt Library 109

Office hours: Tue & Wed, 2:00 - 4:00 PM, Interdisciplinary House, Room 201

Book an appointment: [Link](#)

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of key works of literature and film from various Asian contexts, along with an understanding of their specific cultural and historical backgrounds.
- Articulate and critically engage with central concepts in feminist and gender studies as they relate to the reading and interpretation of literature and film.
- Develop skills in close reading and close watching, applying critical and creative approaches to analyze meaning, style, and context.
- Deepen your understanding of equity and power as they intersect with gender, culture, and East–West dynamics.
- Strengthen discussion skills and engage in informed, respectful, and intellectually rich conversations.

- Write down your own learning goals for this block. What do you hope to gain from this course that will support your learning journey at Colorado College and beyond?
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

Policy

Student Wellness

Your well-being in learning is my priority. One of the main goals of this course is to cultivate curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking—and all of these seeds need well-cared-for mental space to grow. To honor wellness practices, I have built one wellness day into our class schedule. On this day, you are not expected to do coursework and should instead focus on caring for yourself in ways that work best for you. If you would prefer to take your wellness day on a different date, please reach out to me in advance. I will assign you the tasks scheduled for the built-in wellness day so you can take your chosen day off instead—no questions asked, no documentation required.

We often need more support than we ask for. If you or someone you know is struggling, please make use of supportive campus and community resources at Colorado College Mental Health Promotion. The Wellness Resource Center also provides support for you.

Attendance

Attendance is essential in this course. Both class meetings and film screenings are mandatory. More than one unexcused absence will negatively impact your participation grade.

If a class meeting, film screening, or major deadline conflicts with your predictable religious or cultural observances, please let me know by the first Wednesday so that we can make an arrangement that is both supportive and meaningful.

If you cannot attend class due to an unpredictable illness or other personal circumstances (e.g., family emergencies, mental health needs), please contact me by email before class. Your message must include documentation or other supporting evidence (such as a doctor’s note or relevant correspondence). I trust your integrity, but I also ask that you provide explicit evidence to support any excused absence to ensure fairness and consistency across the class.

Artificial Intelligence

Yes, AI is here to stay. As an educator, I see the ability to engage it critically as a core competence for the future workforce and society—it is part of our collective responsibility as members of a civil society to assess and shape its use, rather than shy away from it. But in the context of higher education, you do not want to give away your own original and critical thinking, nor the hard-earned opportunity to study at Colorado College. I urge you to make your choices about AI deliberately.

This class gives you the option to choose: to use or not to use, *that is the question*. Please email me your AI choice by the end of the first Monday.

If you choose to use AI, you are required to do additional intellectual work. You will reflect on your interactions with it, explain how it improves your efficiency and learning, and critically examine its role and presence in your life and by extension, the broader CC community. At the end of the block, due at the same time as your final paper, you will submit a three-page reflective AI essay. In addition, for each major writing assignment in which you use AI, you shall attach a one-page report explaining where and how AI contributed to your thinking and writing. These reports are due alongside the corresponding assignments. No AI may be involved in writing these reflective reports.

You will *not* be penalized for using AI and your paper will be evaluated solely on its quality. But if AI plays a role beyond your control, trust me, the quality of your papers will suffer. Failure to attribute AI usage to the best of your ability and in good faith is plagiarism.

Whichever option you choose, I support you and I want you to trust yourself in this learning journey and claim the chance for your own growth. You are the one who does the reading, comes to class discussions, and lives through the questions that matter to you in flesh and blood. You are taking this learning experience to *your* future.

Honor Code

Using the ideas of another person—be it a professional writer, speaker, or a classmate or friend—without proper acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is a particularly significant issue in this course, because you will collect some of your data in groups, and you will be citing others' work in your research articles. All of your papers, including the group paper, must be your own. Do not take this issue lightly. You are responsible for reading, understanding, and adhering to the guidelines for acknowledging the work of others as outlined in MLA Handbook on plagiarism and academic dishonesty: <https://style.mla.org/plagiarism-and-academic-dishonesty/>. In addition, please see the *Pathfinder* for information on the Honor Code and CC's policies on academic theft. Even when it is unintended, plagiarism carries with it significant disciplinary action. Ignorance of the guidelines is not an acceptable excuse for violations of the Honor Code.

Technology

Laptops are allowed in class when used for accessing readings or class materials. Please be mindful that screens create physical obstructions which have mental effects that often discourage fully engaged communication. When actively listening in class, please fold or half-fold your laptop screen. For jotting down notes, consider using paper or a tablet so the screen isn't up all the time.

Please do not message or text during class meeting time.

Accessibility

I am committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you anticipate or experience any disability-related barriers to learning in this course, please discuss your concerns and/or approved accommodation with me. I would like us to discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course.

Additionally, if you have not already done so, please connect with Accessibility Resources, the office responsible for coordinating accommodations and services for students with disabilities: accessibilityresources@coloradocollege.edu, 719-227-8285, Armstrong 219.

Participation and Community Building

You are expected to participate actively, frequently, and bravely in class.

Our primary materials in this course are literature and film. They invite intimate, one-on-one encounters to which each of us brings our own experiences, perspectives, assumptions, and situations. Talking about these encounters in class can feel subjective and therefore uninviting. Yet one of the goals of studying the liberal arts at the college level is to go beyond a relativism of tastes—the idea that “everyone has their own opinion, so all points are equally valid and there’s no point in discussion.” Our selves are valid starting points but not stopping points. The goal is to develop aesthetic awareness (the ability to notice and appreciate how art creates meaning and emotion) and aesthetic judgment (the ability to make evidence-based arguments about what a work does and how well it does it).

Meaningful participation involves interacting not only with me but also with your peers and contributing to the building of a class learning community. Try your best to encourage yourself and others to contribute—by paraphrasing, building on ideas, making connections, and initiating points that invite others to engage. Our goal is to make communication and collaboration part of how we think, not just what we say.

Sharing your thoughts with a group of people you've just met takes courage. Making a genuine point is always risky, while saying a cliché is safe. Give yourself and others credit for speaking, no matter how much you agree or disagree. People often start by saying, thinking, or writing something imperfect or confusing. Uncertainty and confusion are part of learning. In discussion as well as in writing, focus on expressing, not impressing. Ugly is okay. Confusing is okay. Silence is not.

Ongoing questions to think about in terms of participation are: How do we bridge perspectives and make them mutually enriching rather than divisive? How do we create discussion guidelines that make speaking up a rewarding experience, even when it feels risky? How do we move from personal preferences toward a collective process of interpretation?

You will come to discuss your participation with me on the Wednesday of Week 2. These will be one-on-one conversations to help me understand how to better support you and others. You will submit a self-evaluation on participation on Friday of Week 3 on Canvas

Daily Schedule

This schedule is here to support you in managing your time so that you can move steadily and through the block. Pay close attention to the afternoon to-do items which are essential for preparing for the next class meeting. How you plan and use your afternoons and evenings matters as much as how you participate in class each morning. The schedule is subject to change. Stay attuned to my emails and updates on Canvas.

Week 1

Mon 10/20

- Morning: Class meets at 10:30 AM
- Afternoon:
 - Read *The Field of Life and Death*, up to Chapter 11, including the "Translator's Introduction" and Lu Xun's "Preface"
 - Read "A Sleepless Night" by Xiao Hong
 - Post two close reading responses to *The Field of Life and Death*

Tue 10/21

- Morning: Class meeting. Discuss *The Field of Life and Death*
- Afternoon:
 - Finish reading *The Field of Life and Death*
 - Read "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse" by Lydia Liu
 - Read "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms" by Stacy Alaimo
 - Post one reading response to *The Field of Life and Death*

- Post a 150-word summary of either article

Wed 10/22

- Morning: Class meeting. Discuss *The Field of Life and Death*
- Afternoon:
 - Read “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” by Judith Butler
 - Read my notes on going to film screenings
 - Familiarize yourself with the terms on the *Film Language Glossary* website, and be ready to use them on *Farewell My Concubine*
 - Post a 150-word summary of Judith Butler’s article

Thur 10/23

- Morning: Go to film screening: *Farewell My Concubine* (dir. Chen Kaige, 1993), Max Kade Theater (Armstrong Hall 3rd floor), 9 AM -noon.
- Afternoon:
 - Read “Queering Chineseness” by Jen-Hao Hsu
 - Read “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey
 - Post three screenshots
 - Post two close watching responses to the film

Fri 10/24

- Morning: Class convergence with *Chinese Politics* (taught by Prof. Shiqi Ma). Class meets in Palmer 13
- Afternoon:
 - Read “Lust, Caution,” the story by Eileen Chang
 - Read “Chinese Life and Fashions” by Eileen Chang
 - Read “Modernity and Narration in Feminine Detail” by Rey Chow
 - Read “Gender and Nation” by Mrinalini Sinha
 - Post two close reading responses to the story

Week 2

Mon 10/27

- Morning: Class meeting. Discuss “Lust, Caution,” the story
- Afternoon:
 - Film screening: *Lust, Caution* (dir. Ang Lee, 2007), 2-5 PM, Sacred Grounds
 - Post three screenshots
 - Post two close watching responses to the film

Tue 10/28

- Morning: Class meeting. Discuss *Lust, Caution*, the film
- Afternoon:

- Read “Toward a Gendered Aesthetics of Kpop” by Laurie
- Read “K(Q)ueer-Pop for Another World” by Kwon
- Read “Unpacking K-pop in America” by Lee and/or “Korean-Pop, Tom Gay Kings, Les Queens and the Capitalist Transformation of Sex: Gender Categories in Thailand” by Sinnott
- Find and watch two different K-pop performance videos by bands discussed in the assigned articles. Post two close watching responses (one for each performance) and provide the video links with your posts.

Wed 10/29

- Morning: Class meeting. Discuss K-pop.
- Afternoon:
 - Read *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang up to page 60
 - Watch Han Kang’s Nobel Prize lecture and English script
 - Watch Han Kang’s reading of an excerpt from *The Vegetarian*
 - Post two close reading responses to *The Vegetarian*

Thur 10/30

- Morning: Discuss *The Vegetarian*
- Afternoon:
 - Go to film screening, *Green Snake* (dir. Tsui Hark, 1993), 1:30-3:30 PM, Sacred Grounds
 - Post three screenshots
 - Post two close watching responses to the film
 - Start working on your creative project

Fri 10/31

- Wellness day. Take care of yourself and enjoy Halloween!

Week 3

Mon 11/3

- Morning: Class meets at Fine Arts Center. Come creative and open-minded
- Afternoon:
 - Work on creative project (Assignment #2). Submission due today at 11 PM

Tue 11/4

- Morning: Class meeting. Discuss *Green Snake*
- Afternoon:
 - Go to film screening. *Tropical Malady* (dir. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2004), Cornerstone Screening Room, 1-3 PM
 - Read “Queer Film Settings as Sites of Resistance”

- Post three screenshots
- Post two close watching responses to the film

Wed 11/5

- Morning: Class convergence with *Cinematic Landscapes* (Prof. Arya Rani). Class meets in Cornerstone Studio C.
- Afternoon:
 - Read “Knife Marks” by Kim Ae-ran
 - Read “Interview with Kim Ae-ran”
 - Read “Reweaving the World, Introduction”
 - Post one close reading response to the story

Thur 11/6

- Morning: Class meeting. Discuss Kim Ae-ran; watch Meiji Restoration video in class
- Afternoon:
 - Read “Broken Ring” by Shimizu Shikin
 - Read “Congruent Figures” by Takahashi Takako
 - Read “Historical and Literary Context” for Takahashi Takako
 - Post two close reading responses, one to “Broken Ring,” one to “Congruent Figures”

Fri 11/7

- Morning: Class meeting. Discuss “Broken Ring” and “Congruent Figures”
- Afternoon:
 - Read “Cuties in Japan” by Kinsella
 - Read “Bad Girls in Japan, Introduction” by Miller and Bardsley

Week 4

Mon 11/10

- Morning: Guest lecture; bring your essay outline to class for feedback
- Afternoon:
 - Go to film screening: *Kamikaze Girls* (dir. Nakashima Tetsuya, 2004), 2-4 PM, Sacred Grounds

Tue 11/11

- Morning: Discuss *Kamikaze Girls*; bring the first draft of your essay to class for peer review
- Afternoon:
 - Work on Assignment #3

Wed 11/12

- No class meeting
- Assignment #3 due: today 11:59 AM

Reading / Watching Responses

QAQ (Quote - Analysis - Question)

This exercise is designed for you to practice close reading / watching and analysis on a daily basis. A response is expected to be 100 - 200 words long. I encourage you to follow the structure QAQ (Quote - Analysis - Question) as it prompts both your thinking and our discussion. A quote is a chosen excerpt from the literary or cinematic work that stands out to you. It usually concerns a literary / cinematic technique, a moment of characterization, a recurring symbol, an important theme, a philosophical question, or a turning point in plot. A quote does not exceed a couple of sentences or, if from a video, a couple of minutes, and it includes the page number or timestamp. An analysis is a quick two- to three-sentence explanation of why this quote / scene / image seems important. What is special about the symbol at work, the word choice, language style, or narrative perspective? Does it echo something mentioned earlier in the text, or is it thought-provoking because of its ambiguity - and if so, what is the ambiguity? A question then follows the analysis to connect what you have said to a larger theme, a recurring topic, a social context you are curious about, or a potential research topic.

Responses are due by **11:00 PM** on the assigned date.

Below are examples of student responses that earned full marks on this assignment.

Examples 1. "Knotty pointed to his chest again with his right hand. 'I've already told you, young man. Here.'" (King of Trees 45) This moment shows Knotty's quiet defiance against the destruction of the King of Trees. By pointing to himself, he offers his body as a stand-in for the tree, embodying its voice and value without words. His refusal to act through violence or obedience turns stillness into a form of strength. In doing so, Knotty redefines heroism, challenging the idea that heroes must save people or fight with physical power. Instead, he becomes a hero through empathy and moral courage; protecting life, not just human life. His resistance reveals how narrow human ideas of heroism can be when they exclude care for the natural world. How does Knotty's embodied protest complicate our understanding of who gets to be a hero, and what does it reveal about the power of representing the voiceless in the face of systemic destruction?

Example 2. "In the fourth month, birds were hatching. Yellow-billed fledglings would swoop down, skipping and pecking beneath the eaves. Litters of piglets grew fat. Only the women in the village, like farm horses, grew skinnier in the summer." (The Field of Life and Death 45) This passage compares animals and women in the village. Animal birth and growth in nature are depicted as signs of prosperity, but women, who bear the gendered duty of carrying children and giving birth, are shown as depleted. It highlights the plight of women by evoking animal imagery. How to understand the joy and bodily suffering of giving birth, both for animals and

for women? Is reproduction a shared experience across species, and if so, why does the novella present such a stark contrast? What human perceptions and social problems does this contrast reveal?

Example 3. In *Green Snake* (1993), the opening scene contrasts the Monk Fa-Hai with the crowd of humans below. The humans are shown with almost animalistic traits; working, fighting, shouting, and dressed in dark clothing that blends with each other, making them appear like a mass. In contrast, Fa-Hai stands apart: he is dressed in white, elevated above the crowd, not touching the sand. His physical separation and spotless clothing visually mark him as pure, spiritual, and superior. When Fa-Hai says “humans” in a condescending tone, his disgust becomes explicit. This word choice and delivery underline his disdain for the “secular world,” which he sees as full of pleasure-seeking and emotional excess rather than religious devotion. The scene suggests a hierarchy where the monk positions himself above ordinary people, casting them as beastly and impure while presenting himself as transcendent. How does the contrast between Fa-Hai’s clothing / position and the humans’ clothing / position establish a moral or spiritual hierarchy? What does Fa-Hai’s disgust at “humans” reveal about his own values or hypocrisy? Does Fa-Hai’s elevated status make him more moral, or does it expose a kind of arrogance or detachment from humanity?

Assignment #1 Student Presentation

Story Map and Presentation

You will work on two contextualizing presentations, solo or in pairs. It has two parts—a story map and an oral presentation. The story map will be created using an ArcGIS public account. You will present the story map in class for **10 minutes**, followed by Q&A. Please upload a link to the story map by the end of your presentation day.

Guidelines:

Who is the author? What is the relevant historical and cultural background in which they produced the work? What is the historical background of the setting of the story? What other relevant knowledge might be useful for interpreting the work? Focus on relevance rather than trying to be exhaustive.

Assignment #2 Creative Project

Use a creative medium to adapt, interpret, or translate a work of your choice. Possible options include but are not limited to photography, video, painting, crochet, embroidery, creative writing, or other materials available at the Arts and Crafts Studio (on the lower level of Worner Campus Center).

Potential ideas include (you’re encouraged to explore your own):

- Creating a series of illustrations for *The Field of Life and Death*

- Learning and performing a Peking Opera piece such as Farewell My Concubine and filming your performance
- Reenacting and filming a scene from Lust, Caution
- Expanding a scene from The Vegetarian by writing from a different perspective
- Remixing K-pop dance videos to create a video essay

After completing your project, write a one-page reflective essay explaining your creative process and intent, and how your work relates to or enters into dialogue with your chosen literary or film work. Discuss your design and purpose, and how much your project fulfills your intention. Reflect on how your creation engages with or challenges norms of identity and experience and how it unsettles, reimagines, or expands perception.

Submit by **Week 3 Monday, 11:00 p.m.** For physical work, upload a photo by the deadline and bring the item to class on Week 3 Tuesday.

Assignment #3 Analysis Essay

Literary or Film Analysis

Format: 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, about 5 pages. Use MLA format.

You will develop a sustained argument about one literary or cinematic work's one key aspect. It could be a character, a trope, a literary or cinematic device, the narrative structure, the narrator's perspective, or more abstract concepts like subjectivity, agency, androgyny, queerness, embodiment, trans-corporeality, performativity, affect, emotion, and nationalism. Engage at least one secondary source (e.g., cite a scholarly article, book, or chapter).

Paper development steps:

- **Paper outline (10%):** A one-page plan. The outline sketches out what you plan to write, including a list of relevant textual details, a thesis argument, a couple of secondary sources, and a proposed structure for how your essay will flow. Due Week 4 Monday before class.
- **First draft (30%):** A semi-final version of your paper. This draft represents your best effort at developing your argument in full, even though it will still be open to revision. Due Week 4 Tuesday before class.
- **Final submission (60%):** Submit on Canvas. Due Week 4, Wednesday, 11:59 AM. This version shall incorporate feedback and revisions, and please do not hesitate to make substantial changes if needed or suggested.

Students who attend a Writing Center tutoring session to work on this assignment in late Week 3 or any time during Week 4 will receive a **5% boost** on their assignment grade (for example, an 80 becomes an 84). Schedule early as they tend to book up toward the end of the block.

Evaluation

- Attendance and Participation - 15%
- Reading/Watching Responses - 20%
- Assignment #1: Student Presentation - 20%
- Assignment #2: Creative Project - 20%
- Assignment #3: Literary/Film Analysis Essay - 25%

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
92-100	87-91	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	67-69	63-66	60-62	<60

Evaluation Rubrics

What an A looks like in each case

Assignment #1

- Content: Have done your research and presented relevant knowledge.
- Delivery: Organize information in an engaging way in both the story map and the presentation. Use visuals effectively.
- Q&A: Listen and respond thoughtfully to questions; use your presentation as a chance to spark conversation with the class.

Assignment #2

- Creativity: Present novel ideas or designs that intrigue the reader/viewer.
- Effort: You've put in good amount of intellectual effort and actual labor to work on it.
- Insight: Inspire insight. Make the reader reflect on their own experiences.
- Craft: Use thoughtful technical choice to create an engaging piece.

Assignment #3

- Thesis: State one clear thesis as the final sentence of paragraph one or two.
- Evidence: Support your argument with relevant and abundant textual or cinematic evidence. *Analyze* your evidence. Don't just list them there.
- Organization: Ensure a logical flow—walk the reader through your reasoning step by step using topic sentences. Arrange evidence to serve your argument, not to repeat how they appear in the work's sequence.
- Language: Your writing is succinct, concise, and precise. Avoid repetition, vagueness, and unnecessary words.