

'Chinatown' and the American Imagination

Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen
Spring 2002

Tuesdays, 9:30am-12:15pm & Thursdays, 9:30am-12:15pm

A/P/A Studies, 269 Mercer, #609, 998.3695

Museum of Chinese in the Americas 70 Mulberry, 2nd floor, @ Bayard.

Office hours: T 1:45-5:45 @ 715 Bdwy, #502,

F 12:30-2:30 @ A/P/A Studies,

Important: please make email appt. beforehand,

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This semester we're going to collaboratively tackle the question:

What (the hell) is a 'Chinatown'?!?*

The query is simple, but the answers are not. Via readings, multi-media work, short resource lectures, soul searching, group dialogues, field research, guest speakers, field work, contextual explorations, and three projects, you'll be 'mapping' your distinctive explorations.

I believe in lifelong learning and democratic, participatory schooling. I also believe students can produce excellent, useful work informing the public. I want us to form a lively community in which we collaboratively deconstruct received knowledges and facilitate the building of more truthful counter knowledges. We can facilitate the expression of powerful stories not normally known, nor told. Ultimately, you'll be mapping individual and collaborative projects about 'Chinatown' for targeted audiences.

To perform these tasks, you'll need to locate your own personal and historical position in relation to the production and reproduction of meanings and identities. This self-awareness of the formation of the self and its relation to how various 'others' are constructed will be foundational to all the explorations of the class.

I welcome (and demand) your fullest participation in formulating what you'd like to pursue this semester. I'm trying to find a balance between structure and flexibility. I want to make sure there are plenty of opportunities for you as a class to articulate your resource and contextual learning needs and formulate what we do and how we do it.

My role is threefold: the occasional despot (I organize the class and ultimately decide on the grade), the resource person/skills trainer/expert guide, and, most importantly, the process person.

The semester will be organized in three segments corresponding to three projects each culminating with in-class presentations of the findings.

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| I. Weeks #1-#3 | deconstructing (location, stereotypes, circuits) |
| II. Weeks #4-#9 | reconstructing (skills, interviews, testimonies) |
| III. Weeks #10-#14 | projects (original research, collaborative analysis) |

Generally each class session will be subdivided into group discussions, discussions on resources/context/guest speaker, and group work. Field visits and research will also be organized.

In addition to sheets explaining each segment and the corresponding project, each week you'll be receiving a sheet with the following week's readings, discussion points, trips, etc. Again, this is flexible and with your input will be adjusted from week to week. I've deliberately kept Segment Three open for the class to formulate.

Readings & Resources:

Tchen, *New York before Chinatown* (1999) purchased at discount at A/P/A front desk
Reading packets, Advanced Copy, LaGuardia Place, just below West 3rd Street

Books and reading packets of required and recommended readings will be specified for each segment. Packets are available for request at Advanced Copy. Resource lists and parts of the Wong Ching Foo Collection and the MoCA Archives Collections will be made available.

Requirements & Grading:

Attendance, log books, & active participation	40%
Three projects	60%
a. deconstructing	(15%)
b. reconstructing	(20%)
c. projects	(25%)

Evaluations & self-evaluations will be conducted for each of the three projects and for the final grade. Extra credit options will be regularly made possible. I will want to meet with you during my office hours, or another arranged time, at the beginning of the semester, in the middle, and at the end.

Segment One Overview

Deconstructing the American Imagination: Constituting the ‘Self’ & Representing the ‘Other’

This opening segment is designed to give you insights and tools on how an imagined American identity has been produced, reproduced, and circulated in relation to formulating Chinese and Chinese Americans as “Oriental others.” Project One will be to fully research a representational artifact.

Week #1

Tuesday, 1.22: Charting a starting point

- Orientation: Group goals and interests
- Self & Otherness
 - Locating self
 - Locating Chinatown
- Discuss Project One handout
- Schedule meeting w/JT

Thursday, 1.24: Orientalism & Stereotypes

- Meet at A/P/A Studies
- Read: Said, Rich, Gilman, McCarthy
- Discussion of readings
- Discussion of Project #1
- Select representation to deconstruct

Week #2

Tuesday, 1.29: Life, Liberty & Distinction

- Meet at A/P/A Studies
- Read: Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, part 1; Pateman; Mills

Thursday, 1.31: Cultural Production & Circulation

- Meet at A/P/A Studies
- Read Tchen, *NYBC*, part 2; Ringer; Brodtkin

Week #3

Tuesday, 2.5: Citizenship & Mapping Otherness

- Meet at A/P/A Studies
- Read Tchen, *NYBC*, part 3; Lipsitz; Goldberg

Thursday, 2.7: Project One presentations

- Meet at A/P/A Studies
- Read Tchen, introduction, epilogue, *NYBC*
- Self-evaluations for Segment One