

HUMA 3200 – Questions of Humanity in World Literature

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30-11:50 / Rm 1409 (Lifts 25-26)

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Office Hours: 15:00-16:00; by appointment (Rm 3350)

I. Course Description

This course will, through the eyes of literature, explore and discuss the major issues that encompass various aspects of our daily life, society and the world that we live in. The core questions – What is humanity and how does it make us ‘human’? What is the meaning of life and how do we define it? – will be at the heart of our discussions as we read through the philosophical and artistic contemplations of numerous thinkers and writers in modern times.

To explore a wide spectrum of human experiences and answers to these core questions, this course chooses representative works of literature from a variety of cultures and traditions. To create relevance between the course content and students’ everyday life, the course also provides various in-class activities and writing assignments that help students develop deeper reflection and critical thinking skills in face of the fundamental questions of humanity.

II. Course Theme & Reading

| Dates | Content & Reading |
|---------------------|--|
| Jan 31 | Introduction: The meaning of human existence and identity |
| Feb 12 & 14 | The Existential Question – “The Book of Ecclesiastes”, <i>The Bible</i> (all) |
| Feb 19, 21 & 26 | Self and Community – <i>The Plague</i> , Albert Camus (excerpts) |
| Feb 28, Mar 5 & 7 | Power to the State – <i>1984</i> , George Orwell (excerpts) |
| Mar 12 & 14 | Humanity in Holocaust – <i>Diary of Ann Frank</i> , Ann Frank (excerpts) |
| Mar 19, 21 & 26 | The Clash of Cultures – <i>Things Fall Apart</i> , Achebe Chinua (excerpts) |
| Mar 28, April 2 & 4 | What Money Can Do – <i>Capital</i> , John Lanchester (excerpts) |
| Midterm Paper | <u>Due on April 24 at 11pm (electronic copy; Canvas submission)</u> |
| Apr 9 & 11 | Choices in the Iron House – <i>Selected Stories of Lu Xun</i> , Lu Xun (excerpts) |
| Apr 16 & 25 | Writing History – <i>One Man’s Bible</i> , Gao Xingjian (excerpts) |
| Project Proposal | <u>Due on April 26 at 11pm (electronic copy; Canvas submission)</u> |

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| Apr 30 & May 2 | Future as Utopia? Dystopia? – <i>The Fat Year</i>, Chan Koonchung (excerpts) |
| Mar 7 & 9 | Students' Final Project Presentations |

III. Intended Learning Outcomes

- To enable students to learn about a variety of stories and experiences in human history through the lens of literature.
- To help students develop a deeper understanding of and gain valuable insights into the nature of humanity and human life.
- To enhance students' analytical and critical thinking skills by formulating their own answers towards the fundamental questions in life.
- To cultivate students' ability to apply lessons learned in this course to issues that are highly relevant to their daily life and personal concerns.

III. Course Requirements

- Attendance – 10%
- In-Class Participation – 15%
- Pop Quizzes – 15%
- Mid-term Paper – 20%
- Group Final Project
 - Presentation – 15%
 - Paper – 25%

➢ **Attendance, In-Class Participation and Pop Quizzes:**

- Attendance and in-class participation are weighed heavily in this course. Students are expected to complete the reading assignment PRIOR to coming to class and be ready to discuss and engage in class.
- Pop quizzes will be given from time to time at the start of class WITHOUT prior notice. The quiz usually consists of 2 short-answer questions only and would take no more than 15 minutes.
- Those who are absent for 10 class times or more will NOT be able to pass this course.

➢ **Mid-term Paper:**

The mid-term paper will be a **5 to 7-page, argumentative paper** on a topic related to the first 2/3 of the course. **Paper topics will be given on April 4th**, and students are welcome to discuss the decided paper topic and content with the professor or TA in advance.

➢ **Group Final Project:**

- The final group project consists of 2 parts – **a group presentation and a group paper** (3-4 students max per group). Your task will be to **raise ONE fundamental question** about humanity or human life that is closely related to the content of the course, and bears close relevance to your daily life or inspired by a contemporary event.
- For example, you may approach the question, “How should the power of the people vs. the state be defined?” in light of the political events that occur in Hong Kong nowadays. Or you may ask the question, “What is the strength of humanity in great calamity?”, and interview people who have survived major calamities in life. Or you may explore the question, “Can money guarantee

happiness?" and research on how different people from different cultures or societies answer to this question.

- The group presentation needs to be conducted in some form of **multi-media style** (PowerPoint, iMovie, video clips, etc.), while the project requires some first-hand research on the proposed topic. **Each group only needs to submit ONE paper** (electronic copy via email) in which the writing contribution of each member is clearly indicated.
- The group formation will be decided by the professor and TA by taking into consideration the diversity aspect of each student's background –cultural, ethnic, linguistic, year or disciplinary training.
- Please submit a one-page project proposal on Canvas by April 26th at 11pm the latest.

IV. Class Rules

- **NO plagiarism!!!** – This is taken VERY seriously. Violations (including using online device such as Google translation) will result in a ZERO on your grade.
- **NO use of laptops & mobile phone** – NO use of laptops and mobile phones in class. Please turn on the silent mode of your mobile phone in class and put it away in your bag.
- **Limited use of tablets** –The use of tablets is permitted only for the purpose of accessing the in-class reading excerpts online. It is STRONGLY encouraged that you bring a printed copy of the reading excerpts to class.
- **Listening etiquette** – please listen carefully while someone is talking.
- **Speaking etiquette** – please allow others to finish their sentence before you offer yours.