

GEC1057 Disney Studies: Entertainment, Architecture, Ideology

Instructor: Jeff Clapp

Enhanced and taught in Semester 2 2016

The course "Disney Studies" is already global in scope, because Disney is a major multinational corporation with near-ubiquitous market penetration and recognition of their products. Disney's goal, of course, is to continue expanding its market share wherever possible, a project that it has been pursuing at the global level since the late 1980s and early 1990s with the building of the first theme park outside of the US, and the release of several films with explicit ideas and messages about "diversity."

In the enhanced version of this class, I chose to emphasise global perspectives in two ways:

1) Discussion of *Mulan* (released 1998). Disney's attempt to break into the Chinese market by making a "Chinese" film did not succeed. *Mulan* is extremely interesting as a representation of how Disney uses previously existing cultural material (usually 18th century European fairy tales) but adapts it for the ethos and culture of US-led global, capitalist culture. Thus *Mulan*, originally a parable about filial piety, becomes in Disney's hands a parable about liberal individualism and the notion of one's "true self."

2) Discussion of Shanghai Disneyland (opened 2016). We continued to examine how Disney has adapted itself to the Chinese market by spending significant discussion time on Disney's presentation of its newest theme park. The motto has been "Authentically Disney and Distinctively Chinese," and this message has been carried out in practice and in rhetoric in a number of interesting ways. The discussion here is focused around how global multinationals attempt to identify and market cultural particularity to the very bearers of that cultural particularity itself. There remains more than a trace here of an asymmetrical globe in which US and Western corporations dominate the image-making and storytelling traditions of most of the planet's populations.

These significant emphases in the class particularly enhance students' knowledge of global issues and their sense of what global interconnection really means.