

# Cosmopolitan Communities in Port Cities: Amitav Ghosh's Canton and Yokomitsu Riichi's Shanghai

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Room 8015

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**Abstract:** This talk examines the representation of cross-cultural communities in two works of fiction set in port cities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Amitav Ghosh's *Flood of Fire* (2015) and Yokomitsu Riichi's *Shanghai* (1928–1931). Set mainly in the Chinese ports of Canton and Shanghai, the two novels foreground the littoral landscape of the port city as a liminal space that destabilises the distinctions between land and water, inside and outside. Within this liminal space, the novels' characters form cross-cultural communities that embody a transformative mode of cosmopolitanism. Firstly, these fictional communities echo the empirical dimension of current theories of cosmopolitanism in the way in which they bring together people from different places around the world in the contact zone of the port city. More crucially, these fictional communities speak to the normative dimension of cosmopolitanism, which Gerard Delanty and Pheng Cheah have theorised as a process of self or social transformation that emerges out of the interaction between self and other. The cosmopolitan communities in *Flood of Fire* and *Shanghai* are based on common interests and shared experiences rather than on kinship, ethnicity, religion, and place of origin. As such, they offer forms of sociality that are adjacent to conventional categories of identity formation, especially that of the nation-state. Like the coastal spaces they inhabit, these port city communities cross boundaries to forge new friendships, but they are also subject to being “flooded” and torn apart by historical events and processes that are beyond their control. *Flood of Fire* and *Shanghai* look back on Canton and Shanghai respectively in the wake of increasing British and Japanese intervention in the region over the long nineteenth century. In doing so, the two novels also present new ways of being in the world appropriate to global cities today.



William Daniel, *View of the Canton Factories*, 1805–1806. Image from MIT Visualizing Cultures, [visualizingcultures.mit.edu/rise\\_fall\\_canton\\_04/cw\\_gal\\_01\\_thumb.html](https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/rise_fall_canton_04/cw_gal_01_thumb.html). (License: [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/))

Preregistration via the adjacent QR code at least a day in advance for those coming in person from outside the KU community is greatly appreciated. If you are coming from off campus, please also register as a Guest at the Information counter near the entrance before coming up to the room.

ご来場の方：神奈川大学関係者は事前登録不要です。学外の方は前日までに QR コードにて事前登録をお願いします。当日は 1F の Information カウンターで Guest 登録を済ませてから、部屋までお越しください。

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Loh, Preregistration