

CAH3853: CONTEMPORARY CHINA FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Effective Term

Semester B 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Contemporary China from an Anthropological Perspective

Subject Code

CAH - Chinese and History

Course Number

3853

Academic Unit

Chinese and History (CAH)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

Medium of Instruction

Other Languages

Other Languages for Medium of Instruction

English supplemented by Chinese

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

Drawing on a rich body of ethnographic and anthropological studies, this course provides a comprehensive introduction to contemporary China from perspectives that are not only social and cultural, but also historical and transnational. The first half of the course sets out to survey the profound changes in traditional aspects of cultural practices and social institutions since the end of the Qing dynasty in 1912. Topics that will be examined include family life, kinship, marriage, popular religions, and economic activities. In the second half, the course focuses on more recent developments in cultural formations and social transformations through which China has become increasingly connected with the world. Post-socialist market reforms, domestic and international migration, rural and urban development, state-society relations, and environmental governance are some of the issues that will be explored and discussed.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Develop an understanding of China's cultural and historical continuity as well as socio-economic transformations since the end of the Qing dynasty in 1912	20	x		
2	Demonstrate the skills of critical thinking through effective reading, writing, and oral communication.	20	x	x	
3	Explain the scope and methods of anthropology and its intersection with history through reading ethnography and conducting fieldwork.	20	x	x	
4	Critically analyze emerging issues in contemporary China from an anthropological perspective, especially China's modernization and development and its unique roles in a changing world.	20		x	x
5	Apply acquired knowledge to reflect on how social dynamics in contemporary China have influenced students' own life experience and their engagement with the general public.	20	x		x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs	Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lectures and Film Screenings	The lectures will cover topical issues of post-1912 China, supplemented with screening documentaries and ethnographic films.	1, 3, 4
2	Tutorials and Oral Presentations	Students will join in small group discussions to analyse class materials. Students will team up to present on topics instructed in class and lead class discussion.	1, 2, 4, 5
3	Mid-term Examination	Students will take an in-class, unseen mid-term examination. In the examination, students will be required to answer three questions. The marks for each question will be equally weighted in the final overall mark for the paper. The examination questions are related to the course materials and discussions in the first half of the course.	2, 3, 4, 5
4	Final Paper	Students must submit a final research paper on a selected topic in relation to course materials at the end of the semester. The paper should critically engage and reflect on contemporary Chinese society and culture.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Class Participation (15%) and Oral Presentation (15%): Students must actively participate in activities in lectures and group discussion in tutorials. They are also responsible for helping review the readings and leading class discussion on one week of their own choosing as signed up at the beginning of the semester.	1, 2, 4	30	-	Yes
2	Mid-term Examination: Students will take an in-class mid-term examination. In the examination, students will need to write essays on a few questions that are related to the course materials and discussions covered in the first half of the course.	2, 3, 5	30	-	Yes
3	Final Paper (2500-3000 words): Students are required to submit a final research paper on a selected topic related to course materials at the end of the semester. Students should critically engage the subject matter that reflects a key aspect of contemporary Chinese society and culture.	1, 2, 3, 4	40	-	Yes

Continuous Assessment (%)

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

Class Participation and Oral Presentation

Criterion

This part will grade on students' performance in learning activities based on their class attendance and participation. They are required to complete assigned readings before coming to class and participate in group discussions in tutorials. For the week they are responsible for leading class discussion, they should help review the readings, present on related topics, and sustainably raise questions for discussion.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Strong evidence of:

- Active pre-class preparation and in-class participation, positive and interactive learning
- Familiarity with class materials and excellent grasp of key concepts and the subject matter
- Superior presentation skills, fluent expression, ability to stimulate class discussion, and proper time-management

Good (B+, B, B-)

Some evidence of:

- Active pre-class preparation and in-class participation, positive and interactive learning
- Familiarity with class materials and excellent grasp of key concepts and the subject matter
- Good presentation skills, fluent expression, ability to stimulate class discussion, and proper time-management

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Limited evidence of:

- Active pre-class preparation and in-class participation, positive and interactive learning
- Familiarity with class materials and excellent grasp of key concepts and the subject matter
- Adequate presentation skills, fluent expression, ability to stimulate class discussion, and proper time-management

Marginal (D)

- Marginally satisfies the basic requirements of the participation
- Shows a general grasp of the course materials, limited ability to express clear explanations to the subject matter or to stimulate class discussion

Failure (F)

Fails to meet minimum requirements of class attendance and participation

Assessment Task

Mid-term examination

Criterion

This part will grade on students' ability to apply the concepts they have learnt from the course skillfully and show a basic grasp of key concepts and knowledges in the anthropology of contemporary China.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Strong evidence of:

- Showing clear analysis, a distinctive argumentfull awareness of the secondary literature that we read in the coursecritical engagement with the key debates and discussions in the course

Good (B+, B, B-)

Some evidence of:

- Strong and well-developed analysis
- No significant errors of fact or interpretation
- Identification of intellectual problems and some structured discussion of it

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Limited evidence of:

- Original arguments and potential analysis
- Sound analysis
- Engagement with the literature

Marginal (D)

- Adequate content, limited ability to integrate materials Lack of original, in-depth insights
- Some personal or critical ideas, but not clear or insightful enough
- Limited knowledge about the literature we read in the course
- Acceptable writing skills

Failure (F)

- Insufficient content, lack of coherent organization
- Lack of ability to demonstrate adequate writing skills
- Little evidence of knowledge of the subject
- Inadequate coverage and inadequate analysis

Assessment Task

Final Paper

Criterion

This assessment will grade on students' ability of effective writing and critical thinking. The final paper must be original, insightful, convincing, and well-written in academic form. Students should demonstrate the ability to utilize and analyze materials, draw from key concepts and issues discussed in class, and build up arguments in an organized and structured manner.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Strong evidence of:

- Rich and informative content, ability to integrate various materials
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, and systematic composition
- Ability to interpret and analyze materials critically
- Ability to draw from sufficient and organized references to support the writing
- Creative and insightful ideas, ability to make a convincing argument, shows an in-depth or extensive knowledge of the subject matter
- Precise and fluent expression, appropriate grammar, spelling and citation

Good (B+, B, B-)

Some evidence of:

- Rich and informative content, ability to integrate various materials
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, and systematic composition
- Ability to interpret and analyze materials critically Ability to draw from sufficient and organized references to support the writing
- Creative and insightful ideas, ability to make a convincing argument, shows an in-depth or extensive knowledge of the subject matter
- Precise and fluent expression, appropriate grammar, spelling and citation

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Limited evidence of:

- Rich and informative content, ability to integrate various materials

- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, and systematic composition
- Ability to interpret and analyze materials critically
- Ability to draw from sufficient and organized references to support the writing
- Creative and insightful ideas, ability to make a convincing argument, shows an in-depth or extensive knowledge of the subject matter
- Precise and fluent expression, appropriate grammar, spelling and citation

Marginal (D)

- Adequate content, limited ability to integrate materials
- Loose organization and structure lacks coherence
- Ability to express relevant points to the subject matter, but not clear or insightful enough
- Insufficient references
- Acceptable diction and sentence fluency

Failure (F)

- Vague and insufficient content, weak ability to integrate materials
- Unsystematic composition and incoherent structure
- Shows limited knowledge about the subject matter, and lack of ability to express clear ideas
- No critical comments other than simply summarizing the materials
- Seriously insufficient or no reference
- Misunderstood concepts, inaccurate diction, and inappropriate citations

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Chinese Culture, Chinese History, Chinese Society, Anthropology, Ethnography, Political Economy, Identity, Kinship and Lineage, Gender and Marriage, Religion and Ritual, Socialist Revolution, Post-Mao Reform, Rural Community, Urban Development, Land Use and Spatialization, Market and Consumerism, Popular Culture, Language, Private Lives, Social Protests, Media, Environment, Translocal China, Citizenship, State and Society, Social Stratification, Globalization

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Tamara Jacka, Andrew B. Kipnis, Sally Sargeson. 2013. Contemporary China: Society and Social Change. New York: Cambridge University Press.
2	Cheek, Timothy. 2006. Living with Reform: China Since 1989. London: Zed Books.
3	Yan, Yunxiang. 2003. Private Life Under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
4	Pun, Ngai. 2005. Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace. Durham, London, and Hong Kong: Duke University Press and Hong Kong University Press.
5	Zhang, Li. 2010. In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
6	Pieke, Frank. 2014. "Anthropology, China, and the Chinese Century." Annual Review of Anthropology 43: 123-138.
7	Oakes, Tim and Louisa Schein, eds. 2006. Translocal China: Linkages, Identities and the Reimagining of Space. London and New York: Routledge.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Ropp, Paul, ed. 1990. Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

2	Harrell, Stevan. 2001. "The Anthropology of Reform and the Reform of Anthropology: Anthropological Narratives of Recovery and Progress in China," <i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i> 30: 139-161.
3	Whyte, Martin King and William L. Parish. 1984. <i>Urban Life in Contemporary China</i> . Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
4	Watson, James L. and Rubie S. Watson, eds. 2004. <i>Village Life in Hong Kong: Politics, Gender, and Ritual in the New Territories</i> , Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.
5	Spence, Jonathan. 1981. <i>The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution, 1895-1980</i> . New York: Penguin.
6	Chan, Anita, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger. 2009. <i>Chen Village: Revolution to Globalization</i> . Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
7	Davis, Deborah, ed. 2000. <i>The Consumer Revolution in Urban China</i> . Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
8	Mathews, Gordon. 2011. <i>Ghetto at the Center of the World: Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong</i> . Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
9	Harney, Alexandra. 2008. <i>The China Price: The True Cost of Chinese Competitive Advantage</i> . New York: Penguin.