Humans and Culture (ANTH 1010 / UGEC 1681)

The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Term 1, 2025

Key Details:

Instructor: Dr. Adam LIEBMAN, Ph.D. (email: adamdliebman@cuhk.edu.hk)
Teaching Assistant: ZUO Mengge (email: menggezuo@link.cuhk.edu.hk)
Lecture meeting time/place: Wednesdays 11:30am - 1:15pm / NAH 213
Tutorial meeting times/place: Wednesdays 1:30-2:15, 2:30-3:15, 3:30-4:15 / UCA 103
Office hours: Tuesdays 10-11am and 1-2pm; other times possible by appointment
Office: Room 410, Humanities Building, New Asia College
Office hours sign-up sheet:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tfHyyi2TsXFrUE0q77Bj28XiXFpXefVy86M_6FiFSco/edit?usp=sharing

Image: Shevek from *The Dispossessed*, illustration by David Lupton

Table of Contents:

Course Description:

This course introduces the field of sociocultural anthropology—the study of human culture in its myriad forms, in all times and places. Although the course exposes students to a varied patchwork of *information* regarding the range of human cultural variation, its larger objective is not to impart facts. Rather, it aims to introduce the research approaches utilized by sociocultural anthropologists and to critically reflect on challenging topics involving culture, power, colonialism, history, race, gender, the state, and more. Through grappling with these concepts, this course will challenge students to critically examine their own common-sense assumptions about the world, society, and human nature. In short, the overarching goal of the course is to guide students to "think anthropologically" as they reflect on how culture and difference operate in the world.

Student Learning Outcomes:

After completing this course students will have:

- Understood the concept of culture and analytically applied it;
- Developed an awareness of how people with different cultural backgrounds make meaning of the world differently;
- Identified and analyzed structures and institutions that help create and sustain cultures of inequality and marginalization now and in the past;
- Critically examined their own and others' values, beliefs, and dispositions.

Course Philosophy:

This course is meant to provoke students, and, at times, challenge their beliefs. We are covering some emotionally charged topics. The course is designed according to the philosophy that education is limited if it does not disrupt and perhaps cause students to reformulate some deeply-held assumptions. However, students' perspectives are valuable and valid, and the course is also guided by the philosophy that an education without a diversity of perspectives is limiting. Discussion and respectful debate will be a core component of the course and students will be encouraged to participate fully.

Course Readings:

Some of the readings for this course will be quite challenging. Please note that it is not necessary to understand everything that is written. Instead, students should try to understand the main ideas. Reading questions will be provided for many of the assigned readings. These questions are intended to help guide your reading, focus on key ideas, fertilize critical thinking, prepare for class participation, and prepare for quizzes and the final exam. Although the reading questions are not graded, keeping up with them will be a key to your success in the class. All readings should be completed prior to the class for which they are assigned.

All course readings will be available on the course Blackboard site in pdf format.

Attendance:

Please plan to attend all classes and be on time. Frequent or excessive absences and tardiness will be disruptive to others and will negatively affect student learning and outcomes. However, some absences for health, personal, and extracurricular reasons can occur. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each tutorial session.

Technology policy:

To foster a healthy class environment that is free from distractions, digital devices will not be allowed unless a specific activity requires use of such devices. Instead, students should always bring to class a notebook and writing utensils for taking notes and completing activities. If students need to use their digital devices to communicate with someone during class time (for example, if they are dealing with a family emergency), they are welcome to leave the room to do so.

AI policy:

For all learning activities that will be counted towards the final course grades, students are not allowed to submit work that is produced with the collaboration of or supported by the use of any AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT). Improper/unauthorized use of AI tools in learning activities and assessments will constitute acts of academic dishonesty and will be handled according to the University's Procedures for Handling Cases of Academic Dishonesty.

Grading:

Quizzes (3@8pts) (4 chances):	24%
Film responses (2@8 pts):	16%
Ethnographic project	
Interview:	15%
Fieldnotes:	15%
Ethnographic Vignette:	20%
Participation:	10%

Quizzes

There will be four quizzes throughout the course corresponding with reading questions, discussion questions, and lecture slides (which will be made available on Blackboard). The scheduled quizzes will always be given at the end of lectures. Each student's lowest quiz score will be "dropped," meaning that only students' best three quiz scores will count. Before the first quiz (week 4), your instructor will provide a few sample questions and advice on how to prepare.

Film responses

Although a large part of class time will be devoted to interactive lectures and discussion, we will also watch some short video clips and a few full films. You will complete two film response exercises in tutorials, after watching the films during the lecture. Detailed prompts will be provided. The responses will be graded generously on completion and on your ability to make some connections between the films and course concepts.

Ethnographic project: Cultures of eating at CUHK

Each student will complete a modest ethnographic project for the course, thereby experiencing for themselves the research method that has come to most define the field of anthropology. The topic for this exercise is narrowed to something all living humans have in common: we all must eat.

There are three components to the project. First, students must interview a classmate about how they ate growing up, how they are navigating the daily necessity of eating as a CUHK student, and what observations and opinions they have about food and eating on and off campus. Second, students must complete a set of fieldnotes based on observations about cultures of eating at CUHK. Finally, students will use their interview data and fieldnotes to craft an "ethnographic vignette"--a short, narrative description that illuminates a specific aspect of the topic at hand while making some effort to contextualize the specific aspect within a broader sociocultural context.

Detailed instructions will be provided for each component of the project. The final ethnographic vignette will need to be between 1500 and 2500 words.

All three components of the project will be submitted electronically via the course Blackboard. University policy requires that all students first submit these papers to **Veriguide** (https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login_CUHK.jspx). Without signed declarations from Veriguide, papers will not be graded.

Participation

Structured writing and discussion activities will occur every week in tutorials. The best way to receive participation credit will be to be present for the tutorials and to participate fully. Participation during interactive lectures can also supplement participation during tutorials and therefore students should strive to attend as much as possible. Being attentive, occasionally

posing or answering questions, and generally staying engaged in the lecture will thus also help to satisfy participation requirements. See appendix A for more details on different ways to satisfy participation expectations.

Grading Scale

A	93+
A-	90-92.9
B+	87-89.9
B	83-86.9
B-	80-82.9
C+	77-79.9
C	73-76.9
C-	70-72.9
D+	67-69.9
D	63-66.9
D-	60-62.9
F	<60

Please note that:

- A, A- grades reflect achievement of exceptionally high merit
- B+, B, B- grades reflect achievement at a level superior to the basic level
- C+, C, C- grades reflect basic achievement
- D+, D, D- grades reflect achievement that falls short of satisfying expectations yet still warrants credit

Schedule:

Week 1 Sept 3 Introductions

Introducing the class and short intro lecture

Watch in class:

First Contact (1982), 52 min (available via CUHK library here)

Week 2 Sept 10 What is anthropology (key concepts and methods)

Read before class:

Lee, Richard Borshay (1969). "Eating Christmas in the Kalahari," *Natural History Magazine,* December, p.31-34.

Engelke, Matthew (2017). *How to Think Like an Anthropologist*: "Introduction" p.1-24.

Ho, K. (2009). “Recruitment” from *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*, Chapter 1, p.42-55.

Tutorials: discussion activities

Week 3 Sept 17 Colonialism and racial difference

Read before class:

Engelke, Matthew (2017). *How to Think Like an Anthropologist*: “Civilization” p.56-69.

Loomba, Ania (1998). “Defining the Terms,” in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p.7-22.

Marks, Jonathan (1996). “Science and Race,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 40(2), p.123-133

Tutorials: discussion activities

Week 4 Sept 24 Culture concept

Read before class:

Geertz, Clifford (1973). “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man,” *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.33-54.
(**note: reading guide provided**)

Geertz, Clifford. 1972. selection from “Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight,” *Daedalus* 101(1), pp.1-11

Quiz #1 (covering weeks 2-4)

Tutorials: discussion activity

Week 5 Oct 1 National Day – **NO CLASS**

Read: Watson, James. 1987. “From the common pot: Feasting with equals in Chinese society,” *Anthropos* 82(4/6), 389-401.

Watch (on your own time):

Ongka's Big Moka (1976), 55 min (Available via CUHK library, here)

Week 6 Oct 8 Environment and economy

Read before class:

Harris, Marvin (1974). “Potlatch,” in *Cows, Pigs, Wars & Witches*, p.111-130.

Watch in class:

Cannibal Tours (1988), 70 min (Available via CUHK library, here)

Tutorials: film response #1

Week 7 Oct 15 Culture shock

Read before class:

Le Guin, Ursula K. (1974). Chapter 1-4 of *The Dispossessed*

Quiz #2 (covering weeks 5-7)

Tutorials: discussion activities - interview a classmate

Week 8 Oct 22 Cultural critique

Read before class:

Le Guin, Ursula K. (1974). Chapter 5-8 of *The Dispossessed*

Tutorials: discussion activities

Week 9 Oct 29 Chung Yeung Festival – NO CLASS

Monday Oct 27 Interview assignment due

Read:

Le Guin, Ursula K. (1974). Chapter 9-13 of *The Dispossessed*

Watch:

An Ecology of Mind (2010), 60 min

Week 10 Nov 5 Kinship & Gender

Read before class:

Engelke, Matthew (2017). *How to Think Like an Anthropologist*: “Blood” p.136-160.

Martin, Emily (1991). “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society.* 16(3): 485-501.

Quiz #3 (covering weeks 8-10)

Tutorials: discussion activities - fieldnotes

Week 11 Nov 12 Gender & Sexuality

Read before class:

- Katz, Jonathon Ned (1990). The Invention of Heterosexuality, in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, Paula S. Rothenberg ed., p.68-80.
- Newton, Esther (2000). Selections from *Margaret Mead Made me Gay*

Watch in class:

- *Esther Newton Made Me Gay* (2022), 92 min

Tutorials: film response #2

Week 12 Nov 19 The state, ethnicity, and political agency

Monday Nov 17 Fieldnotes assignment due

Read before class:

- Harrell, Stevan (2001). Selection from *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China*. p.5-11, 16-25.
- Scott, James C. (2009). Chapter 1 from *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, Yale UP, p.1-32

Tutorials: discussion activities - ethnographic vignette

Week 13 Nov 26 Contemporary ethnography and public anthropology (via the anthropology of waste)

- Liebman, Adam (2021). “Waste politics in Asia and global repercussions" *Education about Asia* 26(1), 35-40.
- Liebman, Adam (2023). “Harnessing the stenches of waste” pp.194-213

Quiz #4 (covering weeks 11-13)

Tutorials: wrapping up (working on ethnographic vignettes)

Appendix A: Participation

What does it mean to participate in class and, and importantly, in tutorials?

An important component of this class is discussion. There are different kinds of contributions you can make to discussion, all of which you are expected to work on over the course of the semester. None of these are possible without coming to class each session having read the assigned readings:

1. Attentively listening to discussion participants to build on what has already been said
2. Asking participants to clarify unclear contributions
3. Summarizing key ideas that have emerged during the discussion
4. Articulating an answer to a posed question
5. Raising questions that help advance discussion
6. Offering an original idea related to the topic of discussion
7. Drawing on evidence (social scientific data, personal experience, popular culture) to either support or challenge ideas
8. Constructively critiquing an idea offered in the readings or by a participant
9. Pointing out how various comments complement each other or are at odds
10. Playing “devil’s advocate.”