

Anthropological Theory (ANTH 6010)

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Term 1, 2025



Image: part of *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez (1656)
(referenced in Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*)

Key Details:

- ❖ **Instructor:** Dr. Adam LIEBMAN, Ph.D.
- ❖ **Email:** adamliebman@cuhk.edu.hk
- ❖ **Course meeting time/place:** Fridays 9:30am - 12:15pm, Humanities Building 11
- ❖ **Office location:** Humanities Building 410
- ❖ **Office hours:** Tuesdays 10-11am and 1-2pm; other times possible by appointment
- ❖ **Office hours sign-up sheet:**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tfHyi2TsXFrUE0q77Bj28XiXfPxfV86M6FiFSco/edit?usp=sharing>

Course Description:

This course examines the “anthropological canon:” the works of anthropologists and other theorists that have most influenced the discipline of anthropology. As students gain familiarity with major schools of thought, debates, and concepts in anthropology, they will also take an active role in critically evaluating the canon in response to renewed calls for unsettling the discipline’s underlying colonial logics. In practice this will include reading not just classic texts, but also a few forgotten texts, candidates for canonization, and texts that aim to provoke and guide such a process of critical revaluation. This course thus offers an exercise in shifting perspectives. First, different theoretical lenses in anthropology have led to very different understandings of the phenomena being scrutinized. By exploring a wide range of theoretical standpoints, students will learn how adopting different perspectives shapes our explanations of the world around us. Second, by investigating the politics and stakes of reproducing and remaking the anthropological canon, the course will help students better understand and evaluate their own knowledge practices.

Course Goals:

The course is guided by four main goals:

- gain familiarity with the overall historical development of theory as used in anthropology
- explore how theories reflected and refracted the historical eras and cultural contexts in which they developed
- learn to trace the theoretical threads on which contemporary anthropological arguments are based
- critically evaluate the politics of making and maintaining the anthropological canon, and take an active role in possibly shaping the canon and future versions of this class

Grading:

Attendance and participation:	20%
Design your own week of class:	30%
Subfield review and analysis:	50%

Attendance, Participation, Weekly Assignments:

Please plan to attend all classes and be on time. More than one absence from class will negatively affect your participation grade. The class will be discussion based. Please come to class having grappled with the readings and ready to discuss them. Below is a list of questions that can help you generate discussion points. For each *primary text* assigned, you need to answer at least one of these questions. Bring these answers to each class and submit them to your instructor at the end of class.

Questions:

What did you find most interesting and why?

What did you find most confusing and why?

What made the biggest impression on you and why?

What connections can you make with other texts you have read previously?

What connections can you make with personal experiences/observations or broader events in the world?

What connections can you make with your own developing research project?

Publication Ethics Training

Part of your participation grade will also be based on your completion of the publication ethics training developed by CUHK. The training allows you to gain an understanding of the scope and examples of plagiarism as well as best practices of publishing, applicable to any written academic assignment.

Due Week 5 via email

Access here: <https://www.research-ethics.cuhk.edu.hk/orktsResearch/Web/Quiz/public>

Subfield review and analysis

This is a critical review and analysis of a subfield or a body of scholarship that is at least partially anthropological in nature. You can choose any topic of your interest, such as medical anthropology, queer anthropology, multispecies anthropology, multisensory anthropology, anthropology of the body, anthropology of waste, anthropology of art, etc.). The essay should open with a brief introduction to the object of your research project, and perhaps a guiding research question, leading into an introduction to the subfield you are reviewing and analyzing. The review should in some way include a timeline and a description of the key scholars, texts, and debates that are most relevant to the subfield, including both canonical and less canonical examples. You should also strive to evaluate the field and its strengths and weaknesses, and connect it to broader theoretical approaches and paradigms. You are not required to make an argument. Rather, you should strive to situate your project and guiding research question in relation to the subfield you are reviewing. This could mean showing how you plan to apply, extend, blend, or reject certain theoretical perspectives, for example.

The essay should be based on your reading of primary texts. Do not rely on book reviews, textbooks, and other scholars' review articles, although these types of texts certainly can be helpful for finding primary texts.

There are three components to the assignment:

1) A 200 - 250 word description of your chosen field including a list of at least 6 articles and/or books you plan to read. **Due Week 4**

3) 1st draft: 2500 - 5000 words, excluding references. **Due Tuesday of Week 11 (November 6).** Your instructor will provide comments on this draft.

2) Final essay: 4000 - 5000 words, excluding references. **Due on December 12.** Absolutely no extensions. A **VeriGuide** report must be attached.

More detailed guidelines will be posted on Blackboard and explained in class. Plagiarism and unethical, undisclosed AI writing will result in a failing grade.

Designing your own week of class

Based on your subfield review and analysis, you will design a week of class with 4 -5 assigned texts that correspond with your chosen subfield. Everyone in the class will be assigned to read one selection of your choosing. The choice must not have already been assigned and should complement the readings we have already completed. Think carefully about why you are choosing certain texts and not others in relation to the politics of reproducing and unsettling the canon. Write a 500-750 word essay explaining why you choose the texts, your primary considerations, any difficulties you encountered, and what, if anything, you still find unsatisfactory about your choices. During the final 3 weeks, each student will have a chance to present their “week of class” assignment and how it relates to their research project for 5-10 minutes, before the class discusses the selected reading.

Key guideline: At least three of your selections must be “historical” (originally published before 2000), including at least one selection originally published before 1970. You also must make the case that at least one of your selections is non-canonical and a good candidate for canonization.

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

Reading Materials

Readers:

Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History by McGee, R. Jon and Richard L. Warmes
Seventh Edition. 2020. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

** students can get a 30% discount when buying on rowman.com. Use promo code STUDENT30

Readings for a History of Anthropological Theory (referred to as "Readings") by Erickson, Paul A. and Liam D. Murphy. Sixth edition. 2021. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

A History of Anthropological Theory (referred to as "A History"), by Erickson, Paul A. and Liam D. Murphy. Sixth edition. 2021. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Anthropological Theory for the Twenty-First Century (referred to as "Twenty-First Century"), by A. Lynn Bolles, Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz, Bernard C. Perley and Keri Vacanti Brondo. 2022. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Schedule:

Week 1 (Sept 5): Introducing: anthro theory, the canon, and the politics of citation

Read: - "The early history of anthropological theory" in *Readings*, pp.3-10
- Weiss, Jules (2018). "[Citation is a Gift: 'Punking' Accounting in #hautalk](#)," *Footnotes*.
- Durrani, Mariam (2019). "[Upsetting the Canon](#)," *Anthropology News*.

Week 2 (Sept 12): Materialism vs. evolutionism

Read: - "Marxism" through "Darwinism" in *A History*, pdf pp.1-42
- Marx and Engels: "Feuerbach: Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook" (1846) from *Anthropological Theory*, pp.63-79
- Tylor: "The Science of Culture" (1871) from *Anthropological Theory*, pp.34-49
- Darwin: "General Summary and Conclusion" [*The Descent of Man*] (1871) from *Readings*, pp.57-66
- Spencer: "The Social Analogy Reconsidered" (1876) from *Readings*, pp.51-56

Week 3 (Sept 19): Foundations of social theory

Read: - "Freud" through "Saussure" in *A History*, pdf pp.43-62
- Durkheim: "What is a social fact?" (1895) in *Anthropological Theory*, pp.86-93
- Weber: "The sociology of charismatic authority" (1922) in *Readings*, pp.89-94
- Mauss: excerpts from *The Gift* (1925) in *Anthropological Theory*, pp.94-108
- Freud: excerpt from *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) in *Readings* pp.67-74

Week 4 (Sept 26): Anthropology institutionalizes (early 20th century)

- Read:
- “American Cultural Anthro” through “Psychological Anthropology” and “British Social Anthropology” in *A History*, pdf pp.1-27, 43-56
 - Boas: “The Methods of Ethnology” (1920) in *Anthropological Theory*, pp. 138–147
 - Malinowski “Ch.3 The essentials of the Kula” (1922) in *Readings* pp.62-79
 - Mead: Introduction to *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) in *Anthropological Theory*, pp. 168–175
 - Hurston: Chapter IV from *Of Mules and Men* (1935) in *Anthropological Theory*, pp.178-189
 - “Finding Wang Tonghui: The life and after-life of a pioneer female Chinese anthropologist” (2024) by Mengzhu An, Jing Wang, Jing Xu, and Wei Ye. *Feminist Anthropology* 5(2), pp.230-45.

Week 5 (Oct 3): Structuralism

- Read:
- “French Structural Anthropology” in *A History*, pdf pp.28-42
 - Saussure: selections from “A General Course on Linguistics” (1916) in *Readings*, pp.95-101
 - Lévi-Strauss: “Four Winnebago Myths: A Structural Sketch” (1960) in *Anthropological Theory*, pp.331-339
 - Douglas: “Secular Defilement” from *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), pp.30-41
 - Bateson: “Introduction” and “Metalogue: Why Do Things Get in a Muddle” from *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind* (1971), pp.1-18

Week 6 (Oct 10): Marxist lineages (outside of anthropology)

- Read:
- Marx: selections from *Capital Vol. I* (1867): Chapter 1 “The Commodity,” (pp.125-131, 163-177) Chapter 7 “The Labour Process,” (pp.283-292) and Chapter 15 “Machinery and Large Scale Industry” (pp.544-553, 636-639)
 - Mao: “[Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in China](#)” (1927), focus on the first 7 sections (through “Vanguards of the Revolution”)
 - Benjamin: “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935)
 - Adorno: “The essay as form” (1958)

Week 7 (Oct 17) Theory and anthro 60s-70s

- Read:
- Ortner: “Theory and anthropology since the sixties” (1984) *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26(1), pp.126-166.
 - Geertz: “Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture” (1973) in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. pp.310-323

- Bourdieu: *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977 [1972]), selections from Chapter 2 (via *Readings*, p.406-414) and Chapter 4, p.164-171
- Foucault: "The subject and power" (1982) in *Readings* pp.392-405.

Week 8 (Oct 24) Crisis of representation

- Read:
- Said: Introduction of *Orientalism* (1978), p.1-28
 - Clifford: "Introduction: Partial truths" from *Writing Culture* (1986) in *Readings* pp.415-36
 - Asad: "The problem of cultural translation in British Anthropology" (1986) from *Writing Culture*, pp.141-164
 - Marcus and Fischer: Preface and Introduction of *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986), p.1-16

Week 9 (Oct 31) Feminist anthro

- Read:
- Haraway: selection from "Situated knowledges" (1988) from *Twenty-First Century*, pp.236-240
 - Behar and Gordon: (1995) *Women Writing Culture*
 - "Introduction" (Ruth Behar, p.1-29)
 - "The gender of theory" (Katherine Lutz, p.249-266)
 - "A Tale of Two Pregnancies" (Lila Abu-Lughod, p.339-349)

Week 10 (Nov 7) Post-colonialism

- Read:
- Fanon: "On national culture" (1967) from *Wretched of the Earth*, pp.36-52.
 - Spivak: "Can the subaltern speak" (1988) from *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, pp. 271-313.
 - Rosaldo: "Imperialist nostalgia" (1989) *Representations* 26, pp. 107-22.
 - Chakrabarty: selection from *Provincializing Europe* (2000) TBA

Week 11 (Nov 14)

- Read: - student decided, TBA ("to be announced")

Week 12 (Nov 21)

- Read: - student decided, TBA

Week 13 (Nov 28)

- Read: - student decided, TBA

Appendix A: Participation

What does it mean to participate in class?

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.”