

**ANTH 2402/5402 Topics in Ethnography II**  
**Anthropology of Aging**  
**Spring 2026**

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Time: Tuesday 11:30-1:15 (NAH 11)

Office hours: Wednesday 2-3:30 or by appointment

TA:

Updated: 2025.11.26



This course invites students to explore the anthropology of aging. It will consider both how people experience of aging in diverse cultural settings as well as societal changes that accompany population aging. How do people in different cultures experience bodily and mental changes that accompany old age? When people are forced to retire or experience disconnection from family, how do they find meaning? What is it like to live in a society where there are more adult diapers sold than diapers for babies? The course will begin by introducing core concepts and theories about aging. Thereafter, the course will be devoted to exploring forms and possibilities of aging in different societies, focusing primarily on Asia and Europe. Topics will include family, kinship, ageism, “successful aging,” modernization, and the role of the state. The term will conclude with an in-class conference on aging where students present individual projects.

## Required Texts

All readings are either posted on Blackboard or available as an eBook through the University Library.

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the basic anthropological concepts and theories about aging.
- Identify and summarize key points and arguments in anthropological writings as well as popular media.
- Write descriptively about cultural phenomena and their contexts.
- Reflect on the meanings of aging and how society views older people.
- Critically and sensitively interview a subject about aging.
- Analyze and communicate findings about issues, popular culture, and norms involving older people.

## Grade Descriptors

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Criteria for 1) the course and 2) for coursework</i>
A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.</li><li>2. The work has creatively synthesized course materials and key ideas in an original way. Observations are nuanced, the argument is logical and cohesive, the discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. Concrete evidence corresponds to statements and claims. The work responds directly to the assignment prompt.</li></ol>
A-	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.</li><li>2. The work synthesizes course materials and key ideas in an original way, but there are areas for improvement.</li></ol>
B-range	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.</li><li>2. The work demonstrates a solid grasp of course materials and key ideas. There are areas for improvement with respect to handling complexity, building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence. Response to the assignment prompt may not be sufficient.</li></ol>

C-range	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.</li> <li>2. The work shows some effort, but course materials have not been sufficiently engaged. The argument and the writing are not clear, and/or there is no evidence for statements and claims made. Understanding of course materials and key ideas have not been demonstrated.</li> </ol>
D-range	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.</li> <li>2. The work shows little effort to engage course materials. There are major problems with clarity of argument and writing.</li> </ol>
F	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.</li> <li>2. The work has failed to respond to the assignment prompt.</li> </ol>

### Evaluation

<i>Grade Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Participation and Response Papers	20%	Weekly
Leading Tutorial Discussion	15%	--
Popular Culture Project	15%	February 3
Chapter Analysis	10%	March 10
Final Project and Presentation	40%	April 21

#### Participation and Response Papers (20%)

This course will consist of a combination of lecture and discussion. In order to make the course lively and informative, it is important to keep up with the readings and participate during class. During the last portion of each class, you will be given time to write an **informal, brief** response (<200 words). In addition to your general thoughts, you are invited to include any questions or issues you would like to explore further in future classes. For tutorial sessions, you need to post a question for the class on blackboard about the session's reading(s) by 5pm the day before the session. Facilitator(s) of that tutorial may use the questions to help foster a discussion.

#### Tutorial Discussion Facilitation 15%

Once during the term, you will work alone or in pairs to facilitate a discussion in the tutorial of a week's reading(s). After providing a short introduction to the reading(s), your main task is to offer questions about the reading to stimulate discussion. Please keep in mind that you are free to disagree and be critical about the material in the paper. After leading the discussion, you will be responsible for a short write-up that includes: 1) your introduction to the reading (<300 words); 2) your prepared materials; and 3) a short reflection on how the discussion went (~300 words). It will be due on the Sunday after you lead discussion. A signup sheet will be circulated once enrollment settles.

#### Popular Culture Project (15%)

Find an example of how elderly people are portrayed in a song, Instagram reel, television program, movie, commercial, or anything in popular culture. Write a short essay (UG ~900

words; MA ~1200 words) that discusses the example in reference to the readings on ageism. Show and tell the example you focused on and your analysis during tutorial.

#### Dancing for Their Lives Analysis Paper (10%)

You will write one short analysis (UG ~600 words, MA ~900) of one or more chapters of Huang's *Dancing for Their Lives*. The paper will discuss the themes and theoretical perspectives Huang uses to portray and understand the older women of her ethnography. Do not simply restate the content of the chapter(s). Instead, give your own critical perspective. Any reference to Huang requires a citation – e.g. an in-text citation, footnote, or endnote. Paraphrases require citations. Use quotations marks “ ” for phrases, sentences, and passages you did not yourself write. **Do not consult with outside sources.** Submit your paper to VeriGuide, and then the paper and signed declaration to Blackboard. The paper is due on Week 8 (March 10).

#### Final Project and Presentation

Interview an older person (>64) of your choice. The main focus of the interview is up to you, but it should connect somehow with a course theme on aging, such as “successful aging,” migration, family life, etc. Based on the interview, you will write a paper (UG 1200-1500; MA 1800-2100 words) that includes the following:

1. A research question and brief literature review. For example, “How does COVID impact an older person’s ability to keep socially connected?” The literature review will contain at least five anthropological sources. For this example, the literature review could center on successful aging’s propositions about social life in old age and the impacts of COVID.
2. Describe the person you interviewed, and why this person is appropriate for addressing your research question.
3. Describe the main findings from the interview in relation to your research question. What did you learn from the interview? How does that shape your understanding of your research question?
4. A conclusion in which you reflect on how interviewing older people can help build better theories about and perspectives on the aging process.

Your research question along with a bibliography of at least five sources is due on Week 11 (March 31). You will present your findings on the final day of class, April 21. The finished paper will be due on May 7.

### **SCHEDULE**

#### Week 1 (January 6): Course Introduction

- Huang (2025). *Dancing for Their Lives*, Introduction.

#### Week 2 (January 13): Demographic Transitions and Anthropological Perspectives on Aging

- Huang (2025). *Dancing for Their Lives*, Chapter 1.

#### Week 3 (January 20): Aging and Modernization Theory

- Huang (2025). *Dancing for Their Lives*, Chapter 2.
- Cowgill (1974). “Aging and Modernization: A Revision of the Theory.”

#### Week 4 (January 27): Ageism

- Huang (2025). *Dancing for Their Lives*, Chapter 3.
- Ayalon and Tesch-Romer (2018). Chapter 1
- **For 5402:** Ayalon and Tesch-Romer (2018). Chapter 1

Week 5 (February 3): Successful Aging and Critiques

- Huang (2025). *Dancing for Their Lives*, Chapter 4.
- **For 5402:** Lamb (2014). “Permanent personhood or meaningful decline? Toward a critical anthropology of successful aging.”

**Ω Popular Culture Project Due**

Week 6 (February 10): Pleasures and Meaning in Old Age

- Huang (2025). *Dancing for Their Lives*, Chapter 5.
- **For 5402:** Kavedžija (2015). “The good life in balance: Insights from aging Japan.”

**Lunar New Year Holiday: No Class February 17!**

Week 7 (February 24): Technology and Aging

- Pokšāns and Mileiko (2025). “Encounters Between Kindness and Digitalization: Stories of Older People in Latvia.”
- Huang (2025). *Dancing for Their Lives*, Conclusion.

**Reading Week: No Class March 3!**

Week 8 (March 10): Migration and Aging

- Pauli and Bedorf (2018). “Retiring Home? House Construction, Age Inscriptions, and the Building of Belonging among Mexican Migrants and their Families in Chicago and Rural Mexico.”
- **For 5402:** Myerhoff (1980). *Number Our Days*, Chapter 1.

**Ω Huang Analysis Paper Due**

Week 9 (March 17): Declines

- Taylor (2008). “On Recognition, Caring, and Dementia.”
- **For 5402:** Myerhoff (1980). *Number Our Days*, Chapter 2.

Week 10 (March 24): Conclusion of Life

- Stonington (2008). “On ethical locations: The good death in Thailand, where ethics sit in places.”
- **For 5402:** Myerhoff (1980). *Number Our Days*, Chapter 3.

Week 11 (March 31): Case Study: Japan

- Danely (2017). “Foolish Vitality: Humor, Risk, and Success in Japan.”
- **For 5402:** Myerhoff (1980). *Number Our Days*, Chapter 4.

**Ω Research Question and Bibliography Due**

**Easter Holiday: No Class April 7!**

Week 12 (April 14): Case Study: Spain

- Chirinos (2023). “It Takes Another Kind of Village: How Older Husbands in Rural Spanish Communities Experience Caregiving.”
- **For 5402:** Myerhoff (1980). *Number Our Days*, Chapters 5 & 6.

Week 13 (April 21, Make up class): Mini Conference on Aging

- **For 5402:** Myerhoff (1980). *Number Our Days*, Chapter 7, Epilogue, Afterword.

**Ω Final Paper Due May 9**

**POLICIES**

Late Submissions

Papers submitted after the due date will suffer a fraction of a grade deduction for every day it is late. For example, an A- will become a B+, a B will become a B-, et cetera.

Academic Honesty

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on academic honesty and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on academic dishonesty. Any such offence will lead to disciplinary action including possibly termination of studies at the University. Students should know how to properly use source material and how to avoid plagiarism. Detailed guidelines and examples for the acknowledgement of sources can be found on the University's website at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>. All papers must be submitted through VeriGuide.

Use of AI Tools

**Use of AI tools for course papers is strictly prohibited, including Grammarly, ChatGPT, Quillbot, and others. You are expected to work independently and to cite sources for any and all information you did not collect yourself.**