

ANTH 5390  
Spring 2026  
Monday: 10:30 AM – 1:15 PM  
Venue: TBA

Lecturer: Dr. Tim Rosenkranz  
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Office Hours: By appointment

## **ECONOMY, CULTURE AND POWER**

What is the economy? The answer today is mostly markets, choice, investment, and profit. Yet, this seemingly universal definition tells us more about the power of capitalism and contemporary economics than the diverse and complex social relationships that are economy and society, markets and culture, power and domination. This course enables students to understand, go beyond, and critique such narrow visions of the economy through an introduction to economic anthropology. The anthropological perspective on economy focuses on how people in different places produce, circulate, and consume things to make a living. This living is not just a pay-check, it is everything, it is society, family, intimacy, struggle, belonging, love, and alienation.

This course provides an overview of the key concepts and debates of economic anthropology across time and space by focusing on how things circulate in various forms, hold value, how they become gifts or commodities, and how commodification turns labour, land, or money into things. Through these studies, the course offers a critical perspective on the complex and diverse contemporary issues of economy, culture, and power from markets, gifts, data, commodity chains, work, outsourcing, transnational migration, uneven development, to environmental degradation, and neoliberalism.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

Students taking this course will:

- 1) learn to see the cultural nature of the economy and of power;
- 2) be able to understand how economic behavior that seems irrational in market capitalist contexts can make sense in other cultural contexts;
- 3) learn how to combine universalizing theories and ethnographic understanding of particular cultures;
- 4) understand the way the culture of capitalism shapes the way we see the world and affects our behavior;

- 5) be aware of the history of capitalism, consumerism, globalization, neoliberalism, commodification, branding, the changing forms of work and craft, and see how they are related to each other.

### **Readings:**

This course is based on primary texts (articles, book chapters) to access the depth and complexity of economic anthropological thought, theory, and ethnography. All required readings will be available as PDF on blackboard.

I have included two helpful economic anthropology readers (Hann/Hart + Wilk/Cligert) in the introduction/first class session. These readers provide an introduction to the field of economic anthropology.

### **Course Format:**

This course is conducted in a simultaneous lecture and seminar format. The lecture parts will discuss and introduce the required readings, but it will not give a detailed summary of the readings. It is therefore essential that you do the required readings before class and come prepared with questions and comments. There will be no transcript of the lecture provided afterwards, so please take notes. The lecture will be interactive with room for your questions and discussion. The integrated seminar parts facilitate discussion, further questions of clarification of concepts and to facilitate the final project.

Physical presence is a basic requirement for this course and counts within participation. Excused absences are generally only permitted with a medical doctor's note or in case of a personal emergency. If you have to miss class, please e-mail me beforehand. It is your responsibility to obtain notes from your fellow students about the missed sessions. I will share powerpoints, but there will be no transcript of provided afterwards, so please take notes.

### **Requirements and Assessment:**

The following are the required assignments that will be graded.

1. **Source Commentary + Participation (15 %):** You are expected to do the readings and come to all lectures and tutorials. I strongly encourage you to ask questions and participate in discussion. You are also welcome to e-mail me questions or comments before or after class.

To help you apply the topics and readings to contemporary problems and issues, you will have to finish **one** source commentary and may be asked to present and discuss them during class. For these assignments you have to find sources that can be understood or investigated through the specific concepts, theories or problems discussed in the readings of that week. You are free in your selection, but please **do not use academic articles or books!** Sources instead could be a newspaper article, 'you-tube' clip, blogpost, movie, advertisement, song, etc. The source you chose has to be in English (or with English subtitles) and made available for all students (online link or PDF). As part of this assignment you will have to write a short accompanying commentary, in which you explain why the source you chose is related to our class and why it is interesting. This commentary should be about 200-300 words. Please post this source commentary on blackboard (in the discussion forum). Please be prepared to present and discuss your idea and thoughts during the lecture or tutorial. You can choose which week to submit the assignment, but **it has to be submitted before the Midterm Exam is handed out (week 8).** Please note that you will have to submit your own assignment, no group work!

2. **Midterm Paper (35 %):** The Midterm-Exam will consist of two questions discussing the readings and lectures of the first half of the course (including week 7). The questions will be handed to you in class (9<sup>th</sup> week: Mar 1). The mid-term exam should answer each of these questions separately. The total exam length is 1200 – 1600 words (excluding references) due on **Sunday March 8 by midnight.** The exam needs to be submitted in the assignments on blackboard together with a signed veriguide statement.
3. **Topic-Centered Final Essay (50 %):** This course highlights how political and economic systems have largely shaped our lives – our values, understanding of who we are, and imaginations of human societies. This final assignment asks you to write an essay about a contemporary issue through the lens and themes of Economic Anthropology. You can focus on a conceptual/theoretical issue, or do a short case-study of something the interests you. You are encouraged to do some research or engage with the news (from world news to online content), books, films, podcasts, etc. **A short idea outline (less than 300 words) has to be posted on blackboard before class on March 16.** The final essay should be between 2000 – 2500 words (excluding references). The Final Essay is due on **Sunday, Apr. 26<sup>th</sup> by midnight.** The essay needs to be submitted in the assignments on blackboard together with a signed veriguide statement.

**VeriGuide requirements:** Students are required by university policy to submit all exam papers (except the out-of-class assignments) to VeriGuide

([https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login\\_CUHK.jsp](https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login_CUHK.jsp)). An exam (midterm and final) assignment without a signed declaration from VeriGuide will not be graded.

**Use of any generative AI is not allowed in this class and will lead to an F (and be reported).**

### **Grade Descriptors:**

- A:** Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.
- A-:** Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.
- B:** 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.
- C:** Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.
- D:** Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.
- F:** Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

### **Policies and Support:**

- **Educational Technology:** This class relies on the use of Blackboard. All required class readings, the out-of-class assignment submissions, as well as announcements will be done through it. Note that it uses the email address assigned to you by the University, so it is your responsibility to have an electronic mail forwarded to your main email address.
- **Respectful Conduct and Discussion Rules:** We will discuss many interesting and important topics. While I encourage thoughtful, engaged, and controversial discussion, I expect you to be polite and respectful of your classmates' opinions, limit your statements to academic (not emotional) arguments, and not use offensive language or judgmental statements. Please give each other time to talk, do not interrupt, and most importantly listen to each other.
- **Late Submission:** Late submission will suffer a fraction of a grade per day. For example, an A will become an A-.
- **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:** Academic honesty is crucial and plagiarism is a serious offense. The university has recently updated its policies on Academic Integrity

and the penalties for plagiarism and cheating:

[http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng\\_hm\\_files\\_%282013-14%29/p06.htm](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_hm_files_%282013-14%29/p06.htm). You are required to cite properly (guidelines:

<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ant/tstyle.doc> and

[http://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/english/resource/referencing\\_avoidingplagiarism1.pdf](http://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/english/resource/referencing_avoidingplagiarism1.pdf)) to

avoid plagiarism. Any use of AI-based writing programs (such as ChatGPT) is not allowed and is considered plagiarism. Please do not hesitate to talk to me and ask questions about this.

- **Technology Use:** While technology is an important tool to aid learning, please be respectful and do not distract yourself and your fellow students. Students are only allowed to use their tablets or laptops in class to take notes. Please do not use your devices for non-class related activities (e-mail, social media, etc.) Mobile phones must be turned on silent (not vibrate) and kept in your bags.
- **Independent Learning Center:** If you need help with communication and learning skills, the University has a great resource for you. You can schedule a consultation or attend workshops on various strategies for improving learning outcomes <https://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/EN/mission.aspx>
- **Special Accommodation:** If you need special accommodations or classroom modifications, you need to notify both me and the University's Wellness and Counseling Center (<https://www2.osa.cuhk.edu.hk/disability/en-GB>) no later than the third week of class.

## **Part I: Introduction and Foundations**

### **Week 1 (Jan 5): Introduction and Overview**

#### **Recommended Readings (optional):**

Hann, Chris and Keith Hart. 2011. "Chapter 1: Introduction" (until p. 15). In: C. Hann and K. Hart. *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique*. Pp. 1- 17. Cambridge: Polity.

Wilk, Richard R., and Lisa Cliggett. 2007. "Chapter 2: Economics and the Problem of Human Nature". In: R. Wilk and L. Cliggett. *Economies and Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology* (2nd edition). Pp. 31 – 48. Boulder: Westview Press.

### **Week 2 (Jan 12): Gifts, Circulation, and Value**

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1920. "Kula: The Circulating Exchange of Valuables in the Archipelagoes of Eastern New Guinea". *Man*, Vol. 20, pp. 97-105.

Mauss, Marcel. 2016 [1925]. "The Gift" (Part II: Introduction & Chapter 1). In: M. Mauss. *The Gift: Expanded Edition*. Translated by Jane I. Guyer. Expanded edition. Pp. 55 – 75. Chicago: HAU.

Mears, Ashley: *The Potlatch Revisited: Staging Wealth and Waste*.

<https://asaconsumers.wordpress.com/2017/09/11/consume-this-the-potlatch-revisited-staging-wealth-and-waste/>

#### **Recommended Readings:**

Graeber, David. 2001. "Chapter 1: Three Ways of Talking about Value". In: D. Graeber. *Toward An Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*. Pp. 1 – 22. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Munn, Nancy D. 1992. " Part I: Introduction", "Chapter 3: Food Transmission and Food Consumption". In: N. D. Munn. *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*. Pp. 3 – 48. Durham: Duke University Press.

### **Week 3 (Jan 19): Markets and Economy**

Polanyi, Karl. 2001 [1944]. Chapters 4, 5, 6. In: K. Polanyi. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Pp. 45 – 80. Boston: Beacon Press.

Caliskan, Koray. 2010. "Introduction: How to Study a Global Market". In: K. Caliskan. *Market Threads: How Cotton Farmers and Traders Create a Global Commodity*. Pp. 1 - 21. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

#### **Recommended Readings:**

Hann, Chris and Keith Hart. 2011. "Chapter 4: The Golden Age of Economic Anthropology". In: C. Hann and K. Hart. *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique*. Pp. 55 - 71. Cambridge: Polity

Caliskan, Koray. 2010. *Market Threads: How Cotton Farmers and Traders Create a Global Commodity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Polanyi, Karl. 2001 [1944]. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press.

## **Part II: Fictitious Commodities – Labor, Land, Money**

### **Week 4 (Jan 26): Labor, Time, and Alienation**

Thompson, Edward Palmer. 1967. "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism." *Past & Present* Vol. 38 (1): Pp. 56-97.

Nadeem, Shehzad. 2009. "The Uses and Abuses of Time: Globalization and Time Arbitrage in India's Outsourcing Industries." *Global Networks* Vol. 9 (1): 20–40.

Stallybrass, Peter. 1998. "Marx's Coat." In: Spyer Patricia Border, ed. *Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*. Pp. 183–207. New York: Routledge.

#### **Recommended Readings:**

Wilk & Cliggett. Chapter 4 "Social and Political Economy." Pp. 83 -116.

Carrier, James. 1992. "Emerging alienation in production: a Maussian history." *Man* Vol. 27 (3): Pp. 539-558.

Marx, Karl. 1844. "Estranged Labour". In: K. Marx. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

### **Week 5 (Feb 2): Labor, Craft, and Skill**

Chu, Nellie. 2016. "The Emergence of 'Craft' and Migrant Entrepreneurship along the Global Commodity Chains for Fast Fashion in Southern China". *The Journal of Modern Craft* Vol. 9 (2): Pp. 193–213.

Ocejo, Richard. 2017. "Introduction: A Stroll through the Market" + "Chapter 1: The Cocktail Renaissance". In: R. Ocejo. *Masters of Craft: Old Jobs in the New Urban Economy*. Pp. 1 – 49. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

#### **Recommended Readings:**

Grimes, K. and B. L. Milgram (2000) "Introduction: Facing the Challenges of Artisan

Production in the Global Market.” In: *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternate Trade For the Global Economy*. Pp. 3-10. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.

Curtin, Michael, and Kevin Sanson, eds. 2017. *Voices of Labor: Creativity, Craft, and Conflict in Global Hollywood*. Oakland: University of California Press.

### **Week 6 (Feb 9): Land and Property**

Carrier, James. 1998. “Property and social relations in Melanesian anthropology”. In: C. Hann, ed. *Property Relations*. Pp. 85 – 103. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Verdery, Katherine. 1998. “Property and power in Transylvania’s decollectivization”. In: C. Hann, ed. *Property Relations*. Pp. 160 - 180. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

#### **Recommended Readings:**

Hann, Chris (1993). “From Production to Property: Decollectivization and the Family-Land Relationship in Contemporary Hungary.” *Man* Vol. 28 (2): Pp. 299-320.

Verdery, Kathrine. 2003. *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Wagoner, Paula L. 1998. “An unsettled frontier: property, blood and U.S. federal policy”. In: C. Hann, ed. *Property Relations*. Pp. 124 – 141. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### **++ Week 7 (Feb 16) No Class because of Lunar New Year Break ++**

### **Week 8 (Feb 22): Money, Mobile Money, and Social Relations**

Kusimba, Sibel. Gabriel Kunyu, and Elizabeth Gross. 2018. “Social Networks of Mobile Money in Kenya”. In: *Money at the Margins: Global Perspectives on Technology, Financial Inclusion, and Design*. B. Maurer, S. Musaraj, and I. Small, eds. Pp. 179-199. London: Berghahn Books.

Kwon, June Hee. 2015, “Love and Money in a Korean Chinese Transnational Migration”. *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol. 30 (3): 477-500.

#### **Recommended Readings:**

Bandelj, Nina, Frederick Wherry, and Viviana Zelizer. 2017. “Introduction: Advancing Money Talks”. In: *Money Talks*. N. Bandelj, F. Wherry, and V. Zelizer, eds. Pp. 1 – 24. Princeton: Princeton University Press.



Maurer, Bill. 2015. "Chapter 6: What's in your Wallet". In: B. Maurer. *How Would You Like to Pay?: How Technology Is Changing the Future of Money*. Pp. 95 -106. Chapel Hill: Duke University Press.

+++ Handing out questions for midterm exam paper+++  
**Midterm exam due by the end of March 1 !!!!**

### **Week 9 (Mar 2): Finance**

**In Class Movie:** The Big Short

### **Week 10 (Mar 9): Debt and Credit**

Graeber, David. 2011. "Chapter 1: On the Experience of Moral Confusion" + "Chapter 5: A Brief Treatise on the Moral Grounds of Economic Relations". In: D. Graeber. *Debt: The First 5000 Years*. Pp. 1 – 19, pp. 89 – 126. Brooklyn: Melville House.

#### **Recommended Readings (optional):**

Ho, Karen. 2009. "Chapter 6: Downsizers Downsized: Job Insecurity and Investment Banking Corporate Culture". In: K. Ho. *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Pp. 213-248. Durham: Duke University Press Books.

Zaloom, Caitlin. 2004. "The Productive Life of Risk". *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 19 (3): Pp. 365-391.

Peebles, Gustav. 2010. "The Anthropology of Credit and Debt." *Annual Anthropology Review*. Vol. 39: 225-240.

Roitman, Janet. 2003. "Unsanctioned Wealth; or the Productivity of Debt in Northern Cameroon". *Public Culture* Vol. 15 (2): Pp. 211-237.

**++ post final essay idea on blackboard by Mach 16 before lecture (less than 300 words) ++**

## **Part III: Commodities and Commodification**

**\*\* We will do a fieldtrip session on a Sunday to Shatin Racecourse (this class will be a make-up session for the holiday weeks --- To be scheduled)**

### **Week 11 (Mar 16): Things and Commodities**

Kopytoff, Igor. 1988. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process". In: A. Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective*. Pp. 64-94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Recommended Readings:

Appadurai, Arjun. 1988. "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value". In: A. Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective*. Pp. 3-63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Week 12 (Mar 23): Data and the Attention Economy**

Crogan, Patrick and Samuel Kinsley. 2012. "Paying Attention: Towards a Critique of the Attention Economy." In: *Culture Machine*, 13. Pp.: 1-16

Gershon, Livia. 2019. We All Work for Facebook. Digital labor is valuable even when we do it for free. Should we get paid? <https://longreads.com/2019/04/26/we-all-work-for-facebook/>

Marwick, Alice. 2015. "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy". In: *Public Culture* 27(1 75). Pp. 137–160.

**Week 13 (Mar 30): Commodity Chains and Power**

Cook, Ian. 2004. "Follow the Thing: Papaya," *Antipode* Vol. 36 (4): Pp. 642-64

Mintz, Sidney. 1985. "Chapter 1: Food, Sociality, and Sugar" and "Chapter 4: Power." In: S. Mintz. *Sweetness and Power*. Pp. 3 -18, Pp. 151 – 186. New York: Viking.

Recommended Readings:

Bowen, Sarah, and Marie Sarita Gaytán. 2012. "The Paradox of Protection: National Identity, Global Commodity Chains, and the Tequila Industry." *Social Problems* Vol. 59 (1): Pp. 70–93.

Mintz, Sidney. 1985. "Chapter 2: Production" and "Chapter 3: Consumption." In: S. Mintz. *Sweetness and Power*. Pp. 19 – 150. New York: Viking.

Moor, Liz and Jo Littler. 2008. "Fourth Worlds and Neo-Fordism: American Apparel and the Cultural Economy of Consumer Anxiety". *Cultural Studies* Vol. 22 (5): Pp. 700 – 23.

**++ Week 14 (Apr 6) No Class because of Easter Break ++**

**Week 15 (Apr 13): Commodities, Environment, and the Anthropocene**

Tsing, Anna. 2015. "Enabling Entanglement", "Prologue" + "Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5". In: A. Tsing. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Pp. vii – 44, pp. 73 – 84. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Recommended Readings:

Howe, Cymene and Dominic Boyer. 2016. "Aeolian Extractivism and Community Wind in Southern Mexico". *Public Culture* Vol. 28 (2): Pp. 215-235.

Steffen, Will, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill. 2007. "The Anthropocene: Are humans now overwhelming the great forces of nature". *Ambio: A Journal of the Human Environment* Vol. 36 (8): Pp. 614-621.

Haraway, Donna. 2015. "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making kin". *Environmental Humanities* Vol. 6 (1): Pp. 159-165.

+++ Final Essay due Sunday, Apr. 26 +++