



China Today 今日中國

UGEA 2334

General Outline and Instructions



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Course instructor	Professor Hang Kei Ho
Course units	3
Language	English
Course restrictions	Not for Anthropology Majors; and students who have taken ANTH2410, UGEA2180 or 2190. Co-requisite: Any course with 'UGFH' or 'UGFN' as prefix.
Office hours	By appointment
Version	31 October 2025

Please note that this document is intended to provide a general overview of the course. The assessments, lecture titles, and readings are subject to change.

Course description

How do we make sense of China's rapid development?

Since the implementation of the Open Door Policy in 1978 by the People's Republic of China, the country has undergone a remarkable transformation, emerging as one of the world's most influential global powers. Currently, China holds the position of the second-largest economy in the world, and some commentators predict that it will surpass all others to become the largest economy by 2035. Furthermore, China's GDP in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) surpassed that of the United States in 2013, establishing it as the largest in the world, a position it has maintained since.

Most importantly, China is said to produce approximately five million STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) graduates per year, which is the highest number globally. These graduates have made valuable contributions to various sectors, not only within China but also worldwide. Additionally, China's creative industries, including dining, fashion, gaming, music, film, and tourism, are experiencing growth and recognition worldwide.

Essentially, this course aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of China's cultural, economic, and technological advancements by exploring key themes presented by leading scholars. These themes contribute to the critical debates surrounding the contemporary Chinese society. The course places special emphasis on analysing the role of humanities and social sciences in current academic discussions. It covers a wide range of topics, including theories and case studies in business management, development studies, digital society, environmentalism, globalisation, public health, gender and labour, popular culture, urban consumption, inequality, the super-rich, poverty, and so on. Above all, this course critically examines China's role as a leader, both domestically and on the international stage.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students shall demonstrate the ability to:

1. critically assess and engage with theoretical and empirical academic literature concerning contemporary China, employing insights from humanities, social sciences as well as other relevant academic disciplines.
2. critically assess, evaluate, and summarise policies and other related issues that are at the core of debates concerning contemporary China, and establish connections with the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. develop well-supported explanations and judgments on various topics concerning contemporary China, and to communicate findings through in-class discussions.
4. collaborate in groups and present findings on assigned topics to peers.
5. compose an argumentative academic paper based on a thorough literature review and secondary data collection.

Schedule

Session	Theme	Activity
1	Introduction	Lecture 1
2	Globalisation	Lecture 2 Tutorial 2
3	Economic development	Lecture 3 Tutorial 3
4	Societal values, leadership styles, and business management	Lecture 4 Tutorial 4
5	Pandemic and public health	Lecture 5 Tutorial 5
6	Labour, gender, and sexuality	Lecture 6 Tutorial 6
7	Development paradigms and South-South Cooperation	Lecture 7 Tutorial 7
8	Consumption and marketing	Lecture 8 Tutorial 8
9	Inequality and the super-rich	Lecture 9 Tutorial 9
10	Theorising poverty	Lecture 10 Tutorial 10
11	Digital society	Lecture 11 Tutorial 11
12	Sustainability and the green growth	Lecture 12 Tutorial 12
13	Group presentation and conclusion	Presentation workshop

General outline of the course

- All sessions and assignments are compulsory.
- All assignments must be delivered in English.
- Each session will be divided into two parts: a lecture and a tutorial.
- Prior to each session, students are expected to thoroughly read the assigned literature and prepare notes for class discussion.
- Students may be required to work in groups and take on the role of leading tutorial discussions.
- Working in small groups, students will prepare two case studies and present their findings through two group presentations.
- Students are required to write a short essay during one of the final sessions to demonstrate their understanding of the course. More details will be provided.

Assessments and grading

The quality of the work will be graded as below:

Grade	Overall course
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.

The final grade will be based on four elements:

1. Class performance and participation (20%)

- a. This is an evaluation of your participation in the sessions. Marks will be deducted for non-attendance. In addition, the grade for your participation will also be based on your individual performance. We expect you to contribute positively and constructively to each session. More information will be provided to you during the first week of the course.
- b. You will be asked to work in groups and take on the role of leading tutorial discussions. You are required to submit the group work by the end of each tutorial.

2. Mini presentation (15%)

- a. Working in small groups, this short presentation aims to provide students with the opportunity to collaborate on a small case study. Further details will be discussed in Session 1.

3. Presentation (30%)

- a. Working in small groups, the aim of the presentation, scheduled for Session 13, is to assess students on their understanding of the academic literature related to a chosen subject on contemporary China, and their ability to connect the theories covered throughout the course with practical examples.
- b. Additionally, this assessment format aims to evaluate students' capacity to collaborate effectively and deliver the material in an engaging and professional manner during the verbal presentation.

4. Individual assessment (35%)

- a. In one of the last sessions of the course, you will be given an hour to write a short essay under closed-book conditions. The topic will be announced on the day of the session.

- b. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate your understanding of the course materials and your critical thinking abilities. Therefore, you are not required to memorise every single fact and figure and repeat them verbatim in your essay. If you have attended all the sessions and participated in the tutorials, you should have a solid grasp of the course.
- c. Regardless of the topic given, the essay should include a contextualising introduction, a body that draws on literature and example to present a well-structured argument, and a conclusion that ties together the threads of the argument.
- d. Your essay will be graded based on the following criteria:
 - i. Grammar, language, and rhetorical proficiency.
 - ii. Engagement with academic theories and examples relating to the topic given.
 - iii. Analytical framework, critical thinking, and articulation of arguments
 - iv. Overall structure and coherence of the essay.
- e. Your essay will be collected by the end of the session.

Feedback and evaluation

Course and teaching evaluation survey will be conducted in the second last week of the course. Students are reminded of their responsibility and right to give feedback to facilitate enhancement of the course. Most importantly, students are welcome to give feedback to the course leader at any time in person or through emails.

Late submissions and non-attendance to graded assessments

For late submissions, a 10% deduction will be applied daily. If you fail to participate in any of the assigned graded tasks, such as group presentations as well as other in-class assignments, you will be given a zero. Extensions or resits may only be granted under unexpected or exceptional circumstances.

Academic honesty, plagiarism, and the use of generative AI

Attention is drawn to the University's policy and regulations regarding academic honesty, as well as the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of these policies and regulations. Please be advised that students are strictly prohibited from using generative artificial intelligence (AI) or any similar tools during the completion of assignments. This course will adopt Approach 1 from the *Guidelines on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools in Teaching, Learning, and Assessments*, which means that the course will prohibit all use of AI tools:

Students are not allowed to use any AI tools in any kind of learning activity or assessment that will be counted towards students' final grade of the course, or used for evaluating students' attainment of the desired learning outcomes. Students are expected to produce their own work independently without any collaboration or use of AI tools. Such information should be spelt out clearly in the course outline or learning activity/assessment guide.

Further details on the use of generative AI in teaching, learning and assessments may be found at:

https://www.aqs.cuhk.edu.hk/documents/A-guide-for-students_use-of-AI-tools.pdf.

Suspected cases will be reported to the relevant disciplinary committee. Further details may be found at:

[https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_\(2013-14\)/p06.htm](https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p06.htm).

With each assignment, students are required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures:

[https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_\(2013-14\)/p10.htm](https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p10.htm).

For group projects, all students in the same group are required to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is primarily text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, a statement in the form of a receipt will be issued by the system once students upload the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

Rules

1. Students are expected to arrive on time to class and not leave early unless prior arrangements have been made with the course instructor.
2. No audio or video recording is allowed during lectures and tutorials to ensure open discussion of ideas.
3. Please behave appropriately during class and show respect towards others. Any forms of bullying, discrimination, harassment, or violence will not be tolerated. Offenders will be reported to the disciplinary committee.

Session 1: Introduction

We aim to begin this course by introducing the general debates surrounding the social, economic, technological, and historical context of China both within, and outside the country. Furthermore, we will examine how China is perceived globally through various media outlets. Additionally, we will delve into other concepts such as the Global North, Global South, BRICS, BRI, and their significance in the wider discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We will then cover the course assignments and format. Students are encouraged to ask questions, and open discussions are highly encouraged.

No required reading for this week.

Recommended reading:

- Yu, S., Sial, M. S., Tran, D. K., Badulescu, A., Thu, P. A., & Sehleanu, M. (2020). Adoption and Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in China-Agenda 2030. *Sustainability*, 12(15), 6288.

Session 2: Globalisation

Globalisation is an important concept that has been extensively debated across various academic disciplines and social spheres since the second half of the twentieth century up until the present day. The aim of this lecture is to explore different frameworks for understanding globalisation as a whole, and how these frameworks have influenced the perception of various regions worldwide, with a particular focus on China.

Required readings:

- Artner, A. (2020). Can China lead the change of the world?. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(11), 1881-1899.
- Chukwuma, N. A., Ngoc, L. M., & Mativenga, P. (2024). The US-China trade war: interrogating globalisation of technology. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1).

Recommended readings:

- Nederveen Pieterse, J. (2012). Periodizing globalization: Histories of globalization, *New Global Studies* 6, 2: 1-25.
- Nederveen Pieterse, J. (2015). China's contingencies and globalisation, *Third World Quarterly*, 36:11, 1985-2001.
- Trindade d'Ávila Magalhães, D. (2018). The globaliser dragon: how is China changing economic globalisation?. *Third World Quarterly*, 39(9), 1727-1749.

Session 3: Economic development

The internal and external conflicts that plagued China in the nineteenth century resulted in a prolonged period of decline lasting over two centuries. Nevertheless, China's rapid economic growth since the late 1970s has enabled it to re-establish itself as a major global power. Expanding on the previous lectures, this class will explore the current challenges that China faces, such as de-globalisation, de-risking, and de-coupling.

Required readings:

- Arestis, P., Karagiannis, N., & Lee, S. (2021). The economic growth of China: enabling politico-institutional and socio-cultural factors. *Review of Evolutionary Political Economy*, 2(2), 339-358.
- Yeung, H. W. C. (2012). East Asian Capitalisms and Economic Geographies. In *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to economic geography* by T.J. Barnes et al (Eds), pp. 118-131.

Recommended readings:

- Ma, L. J. (2005). Urban administrative restructuring, changing scale relations and local economic development in China. *Political Geography*, 24(4), 477-497.
- Smart, A., & Hsu, J. Y. (2004). The Chinese diaspora, foreign investment and economic development in China. *The Review of International Affairs*, 3(4), 544-566.

Session 4: Societal values, leadership styles, and business management

Societal values and the concept of kinship are highly valued in the Chinese society. Specifically, it is important to acknowledge how these values and concepts influence leadership styles not only in China but also in other East Asian countries, and beyond. Furthermore, some of these values have been integrated into management styles, negotiation strategies, and business practices. The objective of this lecture is to examine diverse management philosophies by analysing various business models and case studies.

Required readings:

- Ip, P. K. (2009). Is Confucianism Good for Business Ethics in China? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 88(3), 463-476.
- Cheung, C., & Chan, A. (2005). Philosophical Foundations of Eminent Hong Kong Chinese CEO's Leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 60(1), 47-62.

- News article published by the *FT*, May 10, 2018. Hong Kong's tycoons: handing over power in troubled times. <https://www.ft.com/content/de60483e-4c81-11e8-97e4-13afc22d86d4>

Recommended reading:

- Jacka, T., Kipnis, A. B., & Sargeson, S. (2013). *Contemporary China: Society and social change*. Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, pp. 27-46.

Session 5: Pandemic and public health

The COVID-19 pandemic has become the most widely discussed topic globally since its emergence in late 2019 in China. Its impact has been unprecedented, affecting the lives of billions and presenting significant challenges to our understanding of globalisation, public health, natural sciences, and beyond. This lecture aims to foster a dynamic discussion and encourage active participation from students.

Required readings:

- Ho, H.K. (2020) COVID-19 Pandemic Management Strategies and Outcomes in East Asia and the Western World: The Scientific State, Democratic Ideology, and Social Behavior. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 5:575588.
- Kostka, G., & Habich-Sobiegalla, S. (2024). In times of crisis: Public perceptions toward COVID-19 contact tracing apps in China, Germany, and the United States. *New Media & Society*, 26(4), 2256-2294.
- News article published by *Reuters*, June 14, 2024. Pentagon ran secret anti-vax campaign to undermine China during pandemic. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-covid-propaganda>

Recommended reading:

- Barlow, P., van Schalkwyk, M. C., McKee, M., Labonté, R., & Stuckler, D. (2021). COVID-19 and the collapse of global trade: building an effective public health response. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(2), e102-e107.

Session 6: Labour, gender, and sexuality

Economic development in China would not have been possible without a thriving labour force. Furthermore, China is widely recognised for having one of the most educated and industrious population globally. However, the sex ratio imbalance resulting from the one-child policy has made a significant transformation on the society. This lecture will explore the complex concepts of sex ratio, sexuality, and work from various perspectives.

Required readings:

- Hoang, K. K. (2015). New Hierarchies of Global Men. In *Dealing in desire: Asian ascendancy, western decline, and the hidden currencies of global sex work*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 53-77.
- Yuk-ha Tsang, E. (2020). Being bad to feel good: China's migrant men, displaced masculinity, and the commercial sex industry. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 29(122), 221-237.

Recommended reading:

- Williams, W. M., & Ceci, S. J. (2015). National hiring experiments reveal 2:1 faculty preference for women on STEM tenure track. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(17), 5360-5365.

Session 7: Development paradigms and South-South Cooperation

During the Cold War era, the world was divided into what is now formally known as the First, Second, and Third World. Third World countries, which were severely economically and technologically underdeveloped, received foreign aid and economic packages from wealthier First World countries to assist their development. However, this assistance often came at a cost, such as the extraction of natural resources or the privatisation of public goods. This development paradigm was known as North-South cooperation. Decades later, many of these former Third World countries, now referred to as countries of the Global South, remain poor. As a result, scholars and economists have begun to question the effectiveness of this development paradigm. Over the last two decades, a new paradigm known as the South-South Cooperation (SSC) has emerged, in which less developed nations share their experiences and knowledge on development with other developing countries. This approach has proven to be more effective in assisting development. In this lecture, we will examine China's foreign economic development strategies, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and how they have influenced development in Africa and the world at large.

Required readings:

- Alden, C., & Jiang, L. (2019). Brave new world: debt, industrialization and security in China-Africa relations. *International Affairs*, 95(3), 641-657.
- Brautigam, D. (2019). A critical look at Chinese 'debt-trap diplomacy': the rise of a meme. *Area Development and Policy*, 5(1), 1–14.
- Huang, P. C. C. (2020). A New Integrative Vision: China's Belt-Road Initiative and Its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. *Modern China*, 46(5), 463–489.

Session 8: Consumption and marketing

The rapid growth of the middle-class and super-rich in China has played a major role in the increased demand for luxury goods and services. Additionally, many Chinese individuals have developed refined tastes and cultural capital. However, in recent years, Chinese consumers have started to reduce their consumption of luxury goods, leading to a slight decline in the stock prices of some major global luxury brands. Nevertheless, this lecture examines how the Chinese are not only consumers but also financial supporters, exerting significant influence on the design and distribution of global fashion and dining trends.

Required readings:

- Ho, H. K. (2021). Twenty-first Century Wine Consumption Trends in East Asia: History, Luxury, and Transformation, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 6(2), 12.
- Li, G. C. (2021). From parvenu to “highbrow” tastes: The rise of cultural capital in China’s intergenerational elites. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 72(3), 514-530.

Session 9: Inequality and the super-rich

The Fourth Industrial Revolution in China, as well as other parts of the world, have resulted in the creation of a significant number of millionaires and billionaires. However, the concentration of wealth amongst a few elites has also led to income disparity and inequality. This lecture explores the academic perspective on the super-rich and analyses their role in perpetuating inequality.

Required readings:

- Ho, H. K. (2024). Illegal luxuritecture: How the super-rich in Hong Kong land grab and unlawfully expand their luxury living spaces. *Human Geography*, 17(3), 339-346.
- Lu, P., Fan, X., & Fu, F. (2021). Profile of the super rich in China: A social space analysis. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 72(3), 543-565.
- Wissink, B., Koh, S. Y., & Forrest, R. (2017). Tycoon city: Political economy, real estate and the super-rich in Hong Kong. In *Cities and the super-rich: Real estate, elite practices and urban political economies* (pp. 229-252). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Recommended readings:

- Huang, Y. (2016). Understanding China's Belt & Road initiative: motivation, framework and assessment. *China Economic Review*, 40, 314-321.
- Jenkins, R. (2022). China’s Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America: What has Changed?. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 51(1), 13-39.

- Woods, N. (2008). Whose aid? Whose influence? China, emerging donors and the silent revolution in development assistance. *International affairs*, 84(6), 1205-1221.

Session 10: Theorising poverty

Only a few decades ago, China was one of the most impoverished societies in the world, with poverty and illiteracy significantly hindering its development. However, China has now surprised the world with its successful efforts to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. This lecture introduces various ways of conceptualising and assessing poverty, along with the challenges associated with them.

Required readings:

- Chen, S., & Ravallion, M. (2021). Reconciling the conflicting narratives on poverty in China. *Journal of Development Economics*, 153, 102711.
- Selwyn, B. (2019). Poverty chains and global capitalism. *Competition & Change*, 23(1), 71-97.

Recommended reading:

- Hallegatte, S., & Rozenberg, J. (2017). Climate change through a poverty lens. *Nature Climate Change*, 7(4), 250-256.

Session 11: Digital society

The dotcom boom of the 1990s in the United States, and its subsequent burst, laid the foundation for some of the world's largest and most valuable tech companies. These American companies have dominated the global tech industries for decades, producing everything from social media platforms to operating systems, and from networking equipment to mobile devices. However, in recent years, Chinese tech companies have begun to make their mark on a global scale, reshaping the operations of the internet as well as other mobile technologies. With the ubiquity of mobile devices, a world without the internet is almost unthinkable. Despite its convenience, the internet brings with it a host of issues, including privacy, censorship, and control. This lecture explores the dynamic landscape of our digital society, examining the complexities of surveillance, mobile technology, and big data.

Required readings:

- He, Y. (2024). Chinese digital platform companies' expansion in the Belt and Road countries. *The Information Society*, 40(2), 96–119.
- Jiang, H., & Murmann, J. P. (2022). The Rise of China's Digital Economy: An Overview. *Management and Organization Review*, 18(4), 790–802.

Recommended readings:

- Bolsover, G. (2018). Slacktivist USA and authoritarian China? Comparing two political public spheres with a random sample of social media users. *Policy & Internet*, 10(4), 454-482.
- Jiang, M., & Fu, K. W. (2018). Chinese social media and big data: big data, big brother, big profit?. *Policy & Internet*, 10(4), 372-392.
- Liang, F., Das, V., Kostyuk, N., & Hussain, M. M. (2018). Constructing a data-driven society: China's social credit system as a state surveillance infrastructure. *Policy & Internet*, 10(4), 415-453.
- Liu, H., Fang, C., & Sun, S. (2017). Digital inequality in provincial China. *Environment and Planning A*, 49(10), 2179-2182.

Session 12: Sustainability and the green growth

China has made significant progress in developing various green technologies, including renewable energy production, high-speed rail network, and electric vehicles, over the past decade. Specifically, China aims to become a key player in advancing green energy and promoting sustainable growth. With the world currently dealing with the urgent issue of climate change, this topic is even more relevant. This lecture will explore how China is leading the way in this crucial development.

Required readings:

- Fu, B., Liu, Y., & Meadows, M. E. (2023). Ecological restoration for sustainable development in China. *National Science Review*, 10(7), nwad033.
- O'Meara, S. (2020). China's plan to cut coal and boost green growth. *Nature*, 584, S1-S3.

Session 13: Group presentation and conclusion

In this final session, students will be divided into groups and tasked with delivering a presentation on a given topic related to the themes covered in this course. Additionally, students are encouraged to provide feedback to their peers after each presentation. Further details about the presentation will be provided as we progress through the course. We will also use this session to conclude all the topics we have covered.