

Contemporary Hong Kong Society

SOSC 1662 (LX)/CORE1862. Summer 25

3 credits, self-paced online

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Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom.

Course Description

What explains Hong Kong's phenomenal economic success? Why do a quarter of Hong Kong's population live below the poverty line? Why do women in Hong Kong outperform men in education, but earn less money than men? Why do almost a thousand residents commit suicide every year? What are the experiences of Hong Kong's ethnic minorities? How is Hong Kong governed? What explains Hong Kong's troubled political history? How do Hong Kong residents see themselves in relation to the Chinese mainland? Why does Hong Kong have among the highest divorce rates in the world? How is family life in Hong Kong changing?

The purpose of this course is to answer these questions, and more, by developing a *sociological understanding* of Hong Kong society. The aim is not so much to compile facts and figures about every conceivable aspect of Hong Kong, but to develop a *sociological mindfulness* with which to understand it in new and helpful ways. We shall approach each topic by looking at the broad questions and theories that sociologists use to understand modern life. We will then discuss their relevance to Hong Kong and examine local studies. The course is, therefore, both an introduction to sociological thinking and methods as well as an introduction to Hong Kong society.

The theme of the course is social change in Hong Kong from the post-war period. The focus is on how industrialization, urbanization, globalization, and modernity affect our everyday lives, institutions, relationships, and identities. The first two sections of the course will look at the mechanics of these changes and selected social problems associated with them: the transformation of community life, mental health, political, economic and gender inequalities. The final part will examine the implications of and responses to these problems: social movements for democracy, experiences of discrimination, the emergence of distinct Hong Kong cultural identities, the search for intimacy, and family life.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and apply sociological perspectives on Hong Kong Society
2. Analyze and critically evaluate the social context of Hong Kong's economic, political, and social development
3. Articulate the diverse experiences of Hong Kong's residents – from the point of view of low-income families, migrants, sexual minorities, youth, the elderly and other groups.

Required Texts and Materials

1. Online lectures

The lectures for this course are to be delivered entirely online and self-paced. The surest way to do well in the course is to *watch all the online lectures* and take notes. These (along with a PDF of the PowerPoint slides, readings, activities and documentary movies) will be posted on the Canvas website at the beginning of each week on Monday (except where there is a public holiday, in which case the module will be posted on the following day).

Most of the lectures are short (approximately 6-12 minutes long). Some may be longer if they contain additional movie clips within them. I will release three to six video lectures (with accompanying PowerPoints and readings) each week. You should watch the lectures in the correct order, or they will not make sense to you. I have designed them to be watched on a larger screen, not a mobile phone. Subtitles can be auto-generated if watched on the Chrome Browser (instructions will be provided). I strongly recommend that you watch the lectures as they are released each week, rather than watching them all just before the quizzes and Final examination. Aside from attending at least two of the three midterm quizzes (see below) and the Final Examination scheduled by HKUST (May 17-29th), *no other class attendance is required for this course.*

2. Readings

Any worthwhile university course in the social sciences requires that you do some reading outside of the class on your own. I have tried to keep these to a minimum. There will be one or two short articles or book chapters assigned for each week. I have indicated the relevant readings for each class in the schedule below. I will release the relevant readings when I release weekly videos on the Canvas website. Do not worry if you do not understand everything in the readings. I will indicate to you in advance what I want you to find out from them.

Assessment and grading

1. Three mid-term quizzes

Because I will not get to see you face-to-face, it is important that you receive constant feedback from me throughout the semester. I have therefore scheduled THREE short non-cumulative closed-book midterm quizzes during the semester which will be proctored face-to-face at HKUST. I will drop the lowest score of these quizzes, which allows you to miss one midterm quiz, if you must, without it affecting your final grade. This is a large class, and it is impossible to schedule make-up quizzes for individual students.

Since the course has no designated meeting times, I have had to schedule the quizzes outside of regular class hours on Saturday mornings at 11:00-12:00 so they do not clash with your other classes. Before taking this course, please be sure that you are able to attend at least two of the Saturday midterm quizzes, and that you are available for the “contingency” quiz date, in the case that one of the quizzes has to be cancelled due to bad weather or other unforeseeable circumstances.

While we will do our best to accommodate the SEN students, it is essential that you identify yourself to SEN Support at the start of the semester (before the end of the drop-add period) so that we can plan the appropriate accommodations.

2. A cumulative face-to-face Final Examination at HKUST

There will be a proctored closed-book face-to-face Final Examination at HKUST, which will be scheduled by the University during the examination period at the end of the semester (May 17-19). Unlike the midterm quizzes, the Final Examination is cumulative, which means that it will cover the entire course content. Your attendance at HKUST is required for the Final Examination. Again, since this is a very large class, it is impossible for us to offer a make-up examination without medical documentation to say why you cannot attend. As instructed by the University, **international students** should not book their flights home before the end of the Final Examination period, since no make-up can be offered to you if you do this.

The midterm quizzes and Final Examination will be mostly multiple choice and cover the content of the online lectures, and the readings (particularly the questions I ask you about the readings in advance) as well as matters related to the course content raised on the Discussion Forums. There may also be one or two short-answer questions, depending on the size of the class enrollment and availability of teaching assistance. Questions will examine the application of concepts of the course, rather than the memorization of specific names and specific dates. However, I do expect you to know the sequence and decades (1980s, 1990s etc.) in which events occurred and general statistical trends (e.g. has inequality been increasing/decreasing since the 1980s etc.) and to provide concrete evidence for various positions.

Assessments:

| Assessment Task | Dates | Contribution to overall grade (%) |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Quiz 1 | Jun 28 (Sat) 1100-1200 | 60% (only the top two midterm scores quiz will be counted, each weighted at 30%) |
| Quiz 2 | July 12 (Sat) 1100-1200 | |
| Quiz 3 "Contingency Quiz"* | July 26 (Sat) 1100-1200 August 1 (Sat) 1100-1200 | |
| Cumulative Final examination | August 7 1400-1650 | 40% |

*Contingency quiz date:

Should any quiz have to be postponed due to bad weather conditions or other unforeseeable territory-wide circumstances that make it impossible to access the campus, the postponed quiz will be re-scheduled to the same day as Quiz 3 (May 3) at the later time of 12:30-1:30pm.

Please also keep this date free in your diaries if you want to receive credit for any postponed quizzes.

Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Detailed rubrics for each assignment are provided below, outlining the criteria used for evaluation.

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

[add to/delete table as appropriate]

| Assessed Task | Mapped ILOs | Explanation |
|---------------|--------------------|---|
| Quiz 1 | [ILO1, ILO2, ILO3] | This task assesses students' ability to identify sociological perspectives (as distinct from non-sociological perspectives) (ILO1) and apply these perspectives to Hong Kong's social and economic development (ILO2). Students will also be tested on their knowledge of how Hong Kong's residents experienced Hong Kong's industrialization and modernity (ILO3). |
| Quiz 2 | [ILO1, ILO2, ILO3] | This task assesses students' ability to identify sociological perspectives (as distinct from non-sociological perspectives) (ILO1) and apply these perspectives to various inequalities in Hong Kong, including, economic inequalities, political inequalities, gender inequalities, inequalities faced by Hong Kong's ethnic and sexual minorities (ILO2). Students will also be examined on their knowledge of the everyday lives of those living below the poverty line as well as the experiences of ethnic and sexual minorities (ILO3). |
| | [ILO1, ILO2, ILO3] | This task assesses students' ability to identify sociological perspectives (as distinct from non- |

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| Quiz 3 | | sociological perspectives) (ILO1) and apply these perspectives to family trends in Hong Kong (ILO2) and the evolution of a distinct Hong Kong identity. Students will also be examined on their knowledge of the challenges faced by single people and families in Hong Kong and the emergence of distinctive youth cultures(ILO3), as well expressions of local identity in popular culture. |
|--------|--|---|

Grading Rubrics

Detailed rubrics for each quiz/examination will be provided before the exam. These rubrics clearly outline the criteria used for evaluation. Students can refer to these rubrics to understand how their work will be assessed.

Final Grade Descriptors:

| Grades | Short Description | Elaboration on subject grading description |
|--------|--------------------------|---|
| A | Excellent Performance | Demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of the subject matter, ability to identify and creatively apply sociological concepts and think critically consistently throughout the entire course. |
| B | Good Performance | Demonstrates a good working grasp of the main subject matter, ability to identify and apply sociological concepts and think critically throughout most of the course. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to learn. |
| C | Satisfactory Performance | Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, some capacity for applying sociological perspectives and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals. |
| D | Marginal Pass | Has a threshold knowledge of core subject matter, and demonstrates potential to achieve a sociological understanding of some of the material and engage in critical thought. |
| F | Fail | Unable to demonstrate sufficient understanding of the subject matter and an understanding of sociological perspectives. |

Course AI Policy

The three midterm quizzes and final examination will be closed book without the assistance of AI.

Communication and Feedback

We will do our best to announce your quiz scores within a week after each quiz and offer you a checking session where you can see how your quiz was graded. However, please bear with us if we occasionally miss this target by a few days, since you are a very large class.

Resubmission Policy

If any review of grading is requested, students should be aware that their grade may move up or down, depending on the outcome of such review.

How to get in touch with us.

1. Discussion boards

Given that the lectures are virtual, the best way to talk to us and for you to talk with your classmates is on the Canvas Discussion Boards. Here you can post questions, comments, reactions, and feedback on the lectures, readings and assessments in the relevant forums. I will check in on it on most regular working days. To be inclusive, all contributions must be in English, the language that we all share. And strictly no foul language or personal attacks on individual students or faculty permitted

2. Email/Zoom

If, however, you need to talk to us privately, you may email us at sosc1662@ust.hk and, if necessary, schedule a Zoom meeting with me.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST - Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE¹

INTRODUCTIONS

| Date/ Module | Online lectures, readings movies and activities | Assessments |
|----------------------------|---|-------------|
| June 16 Module 1 | <p style="text-align: center;">Introductions</p> <p>Activity: How much do you know about Hong Kong Society? Take the “common sense quiz” https://www.tryinteract.com/share/quiz/60361ace53f328001749f3ca</p> <p>Watch lectures: 1.1 About this course 1.2 About the requirements and procedures 1.3 About the professor 1.4 Thinking Sociologically 1.5 How sociology began 1.6 Themes in modern sociology</p> | |

PART ONE: SOCIAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

How can we explain the rapid development of the newly emerged Southeast Asian economies like Hong Kong? Can it be explained by the unique technologies, entrepreneurs, and value systems held by their residents? Or does Hong Kong owe its development to the external forces of the modern world economic system? In addition to these questions, we examine sociological accounts of how the fabric of community life and belief systems continue to change as a result of Hong Kong's modernization, along with continuing problems of urban isolation and suicide among vulnerable groups.

| Date/ Module | Online lectures, readings movies and activities | Assessments |
|-----------------|---|-------------|
| Module 2 | <p style="text-align: center;">Modernization theories of development</p> <p>Watch lectures 2.1 Modernization Theory 2.2 The missing link 2.3 Capital, technology and governance 2.4 Asian Values 2.5 Critical Questions</p> | |

¹ The dates of topics and readings may change. Please listen for announcements.

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| | <p>Read Chapters 1, 4 and 5, Ezra Vogel. <i>The Four Little Dragons</i>.</p> | |
| <p>June 23 Module 3</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">World Systems Theories</p> <p>Watch lectures 3.1 World systems theory 3.2 Hong Kong and the capitalist world system. 3.3 Experiencing Hong Kong's Industrialization</p> <p>Watch movies Movie: <i>Manufacturing Hong Kong, Hong Kong Manufacturing</i> Movie: <i>Running from the Ghost</i></p> <p>Read Article Alvin So. "The Economic Success of Hong Kong: Insights from a World System Perspective."</p> | |
| <p>Module 4</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Religion</p> <p>Watch Lectures 4.1 Thinking sociologically about religion 4.2 Religion in modern societies 4.3 Institutional religions in Hong Kong 4.4 Diffuse religions in Hong Kong</p> <p>Read article Joseph Bosco: Young People's Ghost Stories</p> | <p>Quiz 1 Jun 28 (Sat) 11:00-12:00 at HKUST.</p> <p>(Will cover modules 1-4)</p> |
| <p>June 30 Module 5</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Social solidarity and suicide.</p> <p>Watch lectures 5.1 Suicide myths and facts 5.2 Durkheim's theory of suicide 5.3 The four types of suicide</p> | |

PART TWO. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INEQUALITIES

Continuing with the theme of social breakdown and conflict since the post-war period, we examine the gap that exists between the community and its political leaders. First, we look at early sociological observations that construct Hong Kong citizens as being apathetic toward politics, and then contrast these accounts with accounts of the development of the democracy movement in

Hong Kong. Political imbalances are also mirrored by social differences between rich and poor, men and women, locals and immigrants.

| Date/ Module | Online lectures, readings movies and activities | Assessments |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------|
| Module 6 | <p style="text-align: center;">Political inequalities</p> <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>6.0 Thinking sociologically about politics 6.1 Hong Kong’s political culture 6.2 Hong Kong’s political system and reforms 6.3 The movement for democracy.</p> <p>Read article Stephan Ortmann. “The Umbrella Movement and Hong Kong's Protracted Democratization Process.” Stephan Ortmann. <i>Asian Affairs</i>.</p> | |
| <p>July 7 Module 7</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Economic Inequalities</p> <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>7.1 Defining poverty 7.2 Measuring inequality 7.3 Individualistic explanations 7.4 The culture of poverty and situational constraints.</p> <p>Read Article Nelson W.S. Chow: “My Experience Researching Poverty over the Past 35 Years” <i>The China Review</i>.</p> <p>Watch movie <i>Tell me things will be better tomorrow</i> https://julac-hkust.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991002811989703412&context=L&vid=852JULAC_HKUST:HKUST&lang=en&search_scope=HKUST_catalog_primo&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,Tell%20me%20things%20will%20be%20better%20tomorrow&offset=0</p> | |
| Module 8 | Economic Inequalities II | QUIZ 2 |

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| | <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>8.1 The government’s response to poverty and inequality. 8.2. Social class and social mobility. Definitions 8.3 Class analysis in Hong Kong 8.4. The power elite</p> <p>Read article</p> <p>Time Out Magazine: “The Men Who Rule Hong Kong.”</p> | <p>July 12 (Sat) 1100-1200 at HKUST</p> <p>(Will cover Modules 5-8)</p> |
| <p>July 14 Module 9</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Gender inequalities</p> <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>9.1 Thinking sociologically about gender. 9.2 Gender and education 9.3 Labour force participation 9.4 The gender wage gap and occupational segregation 9.5 Men 9.6 Gender in the home</p> <p>Read Article</p> <p>SCMP: “Hong Kong Follows Global Trend with Women Dominating Higher Education.” 17 Jan, 2014</p> <p>Watch movie</p> <p><i>Gender gaps (part I only)</i> https://julac-hkust.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991004321539703412&context=L&vid=852JULAC_HKUST:HKUST&lang=en&search_scope=HKUST_catalog_primo&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,pearl%20report&offset=400</p> <p><i>Home-maker dads</i> https://julac-hkust.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991012665778503412&context=L&vid=852JULAC_HKUST:HKUST&lang=en&search_scope=HKUST_catalog_primo&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,house%20husbands%20hong%20kong%20connection&offset=0Links%20to%20an%20external%20site</p> | |
| <p>Module 10</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Ethnic minorities</p> <p>Watch Lectures</p> | |

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|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| | <p>10.1. Thinking sociologically about migrants 10.2 South Asians 10.3 Migrant domestic workers</p> <p>Read Wai-Chi Chee: “Envisioned Belonging: Cultural Differences and Ethnicities in Hong Kong Schooling</p> <p>Watch movies Helper’s Hell</p> <p>https://julac-hkust.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991003208399703412&context=L&vid=852JULAC_HKUST:HKUST&lang=en&search_scope=HKUST_catalog_primo&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,helpers%20hell</p> <p>Minority Report https://julac-hkust.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991012624968803412&context=L&vid=852JULAC_HKUST:HKUST&lang=en&search_scope=HKUST_Catalog&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,minority%20report&offset=0</p> | |
| <p>July 21 Module 11</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Sexual Minorities</p> <p>Watch lectures 11. 1 Sexual minorities I Thinking sociologically about sexual minorities 11.2 Growing up gay in Hong Kong (guest video: Benita Chik)</p> <p>Read Chapter Travis Kong. Oral histories of older gay men.</p> | |

PART THREE. IDENTITY, INTIMACY AND FAMILY

The run-up to Hong Kong’s reunification with China, along with the arrival of migrants and tourists from the Mainland have all led to questions about Hong Kong’s unique cultural identity. The final part of the course explores the shaping of the identity of the “Heunggongyahn” (香港人) since the 1960s. We also examine the more intimate aspects of social life, including marriage and the family.

| Date/ Module | Online lectures, readings movies and activities | Assessments |
|-----------------|---|-------------|
|-----------------|---|-------------|

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|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Module 12 | <p style="text-align: center;">Hong Kong Identity</p> <p>Watch lectures 12.1 The 'Heunggonyahn' 12.2 Hong Kong identity post-1997.</p> <p>Read Article Gordon Matthews: "Heunggonyahn" : On the Past, Present, and the Future of Hong Kong Identity,"</p> | <p>QUIZ 3 May July 26 (Sat) 1100-1200 at HKUST</p> <p>(will cover Modules 9-12)</p> |
| <p>July 28 Module 13</p> | <p>The Hong Kong Family</p> <p>Watch Lectures 13.1 Thinking Sociologically about love and intimacy 13.2 Trends in the Hong Kong Family 13.3 The Transformation of childhood and youth</p> <p>Watch Movies: <i>Hopeless in Hong Kong</i> http://stream.ust.hk/service/watch.php?stream=tv/r/inside-story.2006-0110.mp4</p> <p><i>Millennials</i> http://stream.ust.hk/service/watch.php?stream=tv/r/pearl-report.2014-0616.mp4</p> <p><i>Adolescents in need</i> http://stream.ust.hk/service/watch.php?stream=tv/r/hong-kong-connection.2008-0124.mp4</p> | <p>“Contingency quiz” date for any quiz postponed due to bad weather/other territory-wide conditions.</p> <p>August 1</p> |
| Conclusions | | |

FINAL EXAMINATION AUGUST 7th 1400-1650. YOUR ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED.