

Contemporary Hong Kong Society

SOSC 1662 (LX)/CORE1862. Spring 2026

3 credits, self-paced online

Instructor: Prof. J. M. Groves (sosc1662@ust.hk)

Teaching Assistants: Stephen Choy (choyho@ust.hk), Hui Zhang (sozhanghui@ust.hk)

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? How has Hong Kong influenced global culture?

The purpose of this course is to answer these questions, and many 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 well 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. Aside from attending at least three of the four midterm quizzes (see below), *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:

Four 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 FOUR short non-cumulative closed-book quizzes during the Spring Term which will be proctored face-to-face at HKUST. I will drop the lowest score of these quizzes, which allows you to miss one 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. (Please see policy on make-up quizzes below).

Since the course has no designated meeting times, I have no choice but to schedule the first three quizzes outside of regular class hours on Saturday mornings at 11:00-12:00 so they do not clash with your other classes. The fourth quiz date and time will be scheduled by the University during the Fine Examination period (May 16th-29th) given for this class. Any quiz that has to be cancelled due to bad weather/transport or other unforeseeable territory-wide circumstances that make it impossible to come to campus, will also be held at this time too.

Before taking this course, it is essential that you are available to attend at least three of the four quizzes, as well as the Final Examination date by set by the university in case any of quiz has to be postponed for the reasons above. International students have been instructed by the University to remain for the entire semester and should not book their flights home or take up summer programs before this date. No make-up arrangements can be entertained if they choose to do this.

The quizzes will be mostly multiple-choice questions 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 perspectives. You should also know the main findings of the various studies talked about.

Quiz dates

Assessment Task	Dates	Modules covered	Contribution to overall grade (%)
Quiz 1	February 28 th (Sat) 1100-1200	1-4	100% (only the top 3 quiz scores will be counted. Each quiz is weighted at 33.3% of Final score)
Quiz 2	March 21 st (Sat) 1100-1200	5-7	
Quiz 3	April 11 (Sat) 1100-1200	8-10	
Quiz 4	Scheduled by the University during the University Examination period (16 th -29 th May)	11-14	
Contingency quiz date*	Scheduled by the University during the University Examination period at the same time as Quiz 4 (16 th -29 th May).	Depending on which quiz was cancelled	

***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(es) will be re-scheduled by the University during Final Examination period on the same date and time as quiz 4. Please also keep this date free in your diaries if you want to receive credit for any postponed quizzes. Again, international students should not book their flights home before this date, since no make-up arrangements can be entertained if they choose to do this.

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).
Quiz 3	[ILO1, ILO2, ILO3]	<p>This task assesses students' ability to identify sociological perspectives (as distinct from non-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.</p>

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. '

We draw your attention particularly to the in-class quizzes. Students will be assigned a seat and a lecture theater. They must be seated in the right place in order to be counted as present and gain credit for the quiz. If we have any reason to believe, either from our proctors' testimonies or photographic evidence, that there is any kind of communication going on between students, zero points will be awarded for that particular quiz.

Note that 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

Module	Online lectures, readings movies and activities	Assessments
Module 1 Feb 2 nd	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">1.1 About this course1.2 About the requirements and procedures1.3 About the professor1.4 Thinking Sociologically1.5 How sociology began1.6 Themes in modern sociology	

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

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

Kong's modernization, along with continuing problems of urban isolation and suicide among vulnerable groups.

Module	Online lectures, readings movies and activities	Assessments
Module 2 Feb 9 th	<p>Modernization theories of development</p> <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>2.1 Modernization Theory 2.2 The missing link 2.3 Capital, technology and governance 2.4 Asian Values 2.5 Critical Questions</p> <p>Read Chapters</p> <p>1, 4 and 5, Ezra Vogel. <i>The Four Little Dragons</i>.</p>	
Module 3 Feb 16 th	<p>World Systems Theories</p> <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>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</p> <p>Movie: <i>Manufacturing Hong Kong, Hong Kong Manufacturing</i> Movie: <i>Running from the Ghost</i></p> <p>Read Article</p> <p>Alvin So. "The Economic Success of Hong Kong: Insights from a World System Perspective."</p>	

Module 4 Feb 23 rd	<p>Religion</p> <p>Watch Lectures</p> <p>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 4.5 Religion, politics, social movements and identity</p> <p>Read article</p> <p>Joseph Bosco: Young People's Ghost Stories Ting Gou: "Beyond "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord": Diffused Religion and Religious Co-Optations in Hong Kong.</p>	<p>QUIZ 1</p> <p>Feb 28th (Sat) 11:00-12:00 at HKUST.</p> <p>(Will cover modules 1-4)</p>
Module 5 Mar 2 nd	<p>Social solidarity and suicide.</p> <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>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.

Module	Online lectures, readings movies and activities	Assessments
Module 6 Mar. 9 th	<p>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</p>	

	<p>Stephan Ortmann. "The Umbrella Movement and Hong Kong's Protracted Democratization Process."</p> <p>Stephan Ortmann. <i>Asian Affairs</i>.</p>	
Module 7 Mar. 16 th	<p>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</p> <p>Nelson W.S. Chow: "My Experience Researching Poverty over the Past 35 Years" <i>The China Review</i>.</p> <p>Watch movie</p> <p><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>	<p>QUIZ 2 March 21 (Sat) 1100-1200 at HKUST</p> <p>(Will cover Modules 5-7)</p>
Module 8 Mar. 23 rd	<p>Economic Inequalities II</p> <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>	
Module 9 Mar. 30 th	<p>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 SCMP: “Hong Kong Follows Global Trend with Women Dominating Higher Education.” 17 Jan, 2014</p> <p>Watch movie <i>Gender gaps (part 1 only)</i> https://julac-hkust.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alm_a991004321539703412&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=alm_a991012665778503412&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>	
Module 10 Apr 6	<p>Ethnic minorities</p> <p>Watch Lectures</p> <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 https://julac-hkust.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alm_a991003208399703412&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</p>	<p>QUIZ 3 April 11 (Sat) 1100-1200 at HKUST (Will cover Modules 8-10)</p>

	https://julac-hkust.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991012624968803412&context=L&vid=852JULAC_HKUST:H_KUST&lang=en&search_scope=HKUST_Catalog&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any.contains,minority%20report&offset=0	
Module 11 April. 13 th	<p>Sexual Minorities</p> <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>11. 1 Sexual minorities I Thinking sociologically about sexual minorities</p> <p>11.2 Growing up gay in Hong Kong (guest video: Benita Chik)</p> <p>Read Chapter</p> <p>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.

Week	Online lectures, readings movies and activities	Assessments
Module 12 Apr. 20 th .	<p>Hong Kong Identity</p> <p>Watch lectures</p> <p>12.1 The 'Heunggongyahn'</p> <p>12.2 Hong Kong identity post-1997.</p> <p>Read Article</p> <p>Gordon Matthews: "Heunggongyahn" : On the Past, Present, and the Future of Hong Kong Identity,"</p>	
Module 13 Apr 27 th	<p>The Hong Kong Family</p> <p>Watch Lectures</p> <p>13.1 Thinking Sociologically about love and intimacy</p> <p>13.2 Trends in the Hong Kong Family</p> <p>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>	
Module 14 May 4 th	<p>Hong Kong's Global Significance</p> <p>Read article: Yuk Wah Chan: Hong Kongers and the Hong Kong diasporic foodscape in the UK.</p> <p>Conclusions and Review</p>	
May 16-19 (date to be determined by the University).		QUIZ 4: (Will cover Modules 10-14)