

HMMA 5001 Fundamentals of Chinese Culture
Fall 2025

Instructors: NAM, Sai Lok (shlewis@ust.hk; room 2367)
ONGARO Giulio (giulio.ongaro@ust.hk; room 2354)
MA, Xiaolu (hmxlma@ust.hk; room 3377)
CABOARA, Marco (hmcaboara@ust.hk; room 3341)

Class Time: Tuesdays, 18:00-20:50
or
Class Time: **Thursdays, 18:00-20:50**
Classroom: LSK 1033

I. Course Description:

This is an integrated multidisciplinary course on Chinese culture. It aims at providing students with a broad understanding of the perspectives and methodologies of humanistic studies on Chinese culture across various disciplines, including anthropology, history, linguistics, literature, philosophy, and religion. In each offering of the course, 4 out of these 6 disciplines will be offered, with an emphasis placed on the introduction to fundamental concepts and general methodological/theoretical underpinnings of the studies of Chinese culture in humanities. This is a mandatory foundation course for all students in the MA Program in Chinese Culture.

II. Course Objectives:

Upon the completion of the course, students may be expected to attain the following attributes:

- 1) A broad understanding of the nature, scope and value of the studies of Chinese culture from humanities perspectives;
- 2) Better appreciation of the basic concepts, theories and methods in different humanities disciplines essential to the building of a holistic, dynamic and integrated understanding of Chinese culture;
- 3) Ability to respond critically to Chinese cultural texts and issues of various natures;
- 4) Strengthened skills in humanistic inquiry pertaining to Chinese culture, such as questioning, analyzing, interpreting, making connections and constructing arguments.

III. Course Assessment:

1) Attendance & in-class participation: 20%

Students are expected to complete the reading assignment PRIOR to coming to class and be ready to discuss and engage in class.

All assigned reading materials are either in electronic form or posted on Canvas, with the full-length books or additional reference materials placed on reserve in the library under this course code.

2) 4 short module papers: 80% (20% per module)

Normally, students are required to write a short paper for each of the four modules. Each module paper should be 1,400-1,600 words long, neatly typed and double-spaced, and is due 3 weeks after the completion of respective module.

Marks will be deducted from paper either shorter or longer than is required, with 5% for every hundred words.

Penalty will also be applied to late paper, with a daily deduction of 5%. Note that unless exceptional contingencies, request for extension will not be entertained.

The topic of each module paper varies, depending on the content of individual module and instructor's requirement.

Note that students might be required to write a book review and/or a report, rather than a paper, subject to the specific requirement of individual module.

IV. Class Schedule:

Date	Modules	Instructor
Sept 2, 9, 16 Sept 4, 11, 18	Introduction; Literature	Xiaolu MA
Sept 23, 30, Oct 14 Sept 25, Oct 2, 9	Anthropology	Giulio ONGARO
Oct 21, 28 Nov 4 Oct 23, 30, Nov 6	Philosophy/ Religion	Sai Lok NAM
Nov 11, 18, 25 Nov 13, 20, 27	History	Marco CABOARA

*No class on Oct 16

V. Module Description:

1) Literature Module: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Literary Studies

Is literary study a stand-alone discipline with a clear or unique methodological approach, or does it require a well-versed understanding of different disciplinary traditions within the field of humanities as a whole? This module will take this question to the heart of its discussion and give special attention to reflecting how modern Chinese literature is approached, understood and articulated in both Chinese and Western academia.

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September 2 or 4: Introduction

Xiaolu Ma, *Transpatial Modernity: Chinese Cultural Encounters with Russia through the Prism of Japan (1880–1930)* (Selected)

September 9 or 11: Comparative literature and Chinese Literature

Jinyi Chu, *Fin-de-siècle Russia and Chinese Aesthetics: The Other Is the Universal* (Selected)

Miya Qiong Xie, *Territorializing Manchuria : the transnational frontier and literatures of East Asia* (Selected)

September 18: Intellectual History and Chinese Literature

Hang Tu, *Sentimental Republic: Chinese Intellectuals and the Maoist Past* (Selected)

Note: Hang Tu will give a lecture about his book. An announcement will be made close to the date of lecture.

2) Anthropology Module: Fieldwork and Cultural Relativism in the Chinese Context

One of the key methods for studying human societies in anthropology is ethnographic fieldwork. Anthropologists immerse themselves long-term in the communities they study and actively participate in people's daily life. This approach enables researchers to delve deeply into the lived reality of their

interlocutors, to make intelligible what may initially seem strange or unnatural about their worldview, but also to question, in turn, the naturalness of one's own. Following an introductory class on the foundations of anthropology, this module will examine two phenomena in the Chinese context that require fieldwork and cultural sensibility for deeper understanding: spirit beliefs and mental illness.

Sept 23 or Sept 25: Field research methods and the concept of cultural relativism

- ♦ Malinowski, B. (1922). "Introduction" in *Argonauts of the western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. Routledge.
- ♦ Fei Xiaotong (1989). 'Land without ghosts' in R. David Arkush and Leo Oufan Lee (eds) *Land Without Ghosts: Chinese Impressions of America from the Mid-nineteenth Century to the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ♦ Watson, James L. and Rubie S. Watson. 2004. "Fieldwork in Hong Kong New Territories (1969-1977)." In *Village Life in Hong Kong: Politics, Gender, and Ritual in the New Territories*, pp. 3-18. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Sept 30 or Oct 2: The anthropology of 'apparently irrational beliefs': a case-study on the Akha people of Xishuangbanna and northern Laos

- ♦ Ongaro, G. (forthcoming, 2026). 'Whose tribalism?' in Gutierrez, A. & Musallam, F. (eds.) *New Questions of Anthropology*. London School of Economics Social Anthropology Monographs. LSE Press.
- ♦ Scott, J. C. (2009). "Introduction" *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*. Yale University Press.
- ♦ Tooker, D. E. (1992). Identity Systems of Highland Burma: 'Belief', Akha zán, and a critique of interiorized notions of ethno-religious identity. *Man*, 799-819.

Oct 14 or Oct 9: The anthropology of mental illness

- ♦ Kleinman, A. (1988). Views: A window on mental health in China. *American Scientist*, 76(1), 22-27.
- ♦ Ng, E. (2020). "Introduction" in *A time of lost gods: Mediumship, madness, and the ghost after Mao*. University of California Press.
- ♦ Zhang, L. (2020). "Introduction" in *Anxious China: Inner revolution and politics of psychotherapy*. University of California Press.

3) Philosophy Module: Chinese Philosophical Perspectives on Human Effort and Fortune

In this module, students will explore the ancient Chinese philosophers' perspectives on the relationship between human effort and fortune. They will delve into key concepts such as *Tian* and *Ming* in Chinese philosophy, Xunzi's emphasis on human effort, Daoists' views on destiny, Mencius's beliefs about human nature, and the connection between morality and human nature. Additionally, students will reflect on Zhuangzi's observations on life and reflect on the pursuit of happiness. By the end of the module, students will have gained a deeper understanding of these fundamental aspects of Chinese culture and philosophy.

Oct 21 or 23: The Conceptions of Tian, Ming, and Ren

- ♦ Mozi's Chapter 35 "Against Fate I"
- ♦ Xunzi's Chapter 17 "A Discussion of Heaven"
- ♦ Liezi's Chapter 6 "Endeavor and Destiny"

Oct 28 or 30: Mencius on Human Nature

- ♦ Selected passages in the *Mencius*

Nov 4 or 6: Zhuangzi on Happiness

- ♦ Zhuangzi's Chapter 1 "Free and Easy Wandering"

4) History Module: History Module: Travels, maps, science

In this module we will look at Chinese history from a comparative perspective by focusing on three remarkable Europeans that, from the 13th to the 20th century visited the country, interacted with its elites and questioned the meaning of their experience: Marco Polo (1254-1324), Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and Joseph Needham (1900-1995).

The three visitors all left sources, literary, cartographical, scientific- each one will be presented as a product of his own time and for what it can tell us about the Europe they left and the China they visited, now and then.

Nov 11 or 13: Marco Polo, his travels, his book, reality and fiction

1. Polo, Marco. 1931. *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Edited by Luigi Foscolo Benedetto and E. Denison Ross. Translated by Aldo Ricci. London: George Routledge & Sons, pp. 1-19 (author's prologue)

<https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.24102/page/n1/mode/2up>

2. Pegolotti's Merchant Handbook

<https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/pegol.html>

3. Jackson, Peter. "Marco Polo and His 'Travels.'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, vol. 61, no. 1, 1998, pp. 82–101. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3107293>.

Nov 18 or 20: Mapping China, mapping the world- Matteo Ricci and other mapmakers

1. Caboara, M., "Making and Structure of this Cartobibliography" in *Regnum Chinae* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), pp. 15-37
2. Yee, Cordell DK. "Traditional Chinese cartography and the myth of westernization." *The History of Cartography* 2.part 2 (1994): 170-202

Nov 25 or 27: Needham's question: why did Modern Science develop in Europe when China seemed so much better placed to achieve it?

1. Needham, Joseph. "Science and Society in East and West." *Science & Society*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1964, pp. 385–408. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40401068>
2. In Our Time: The Needham Question
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0038x9m>
3. O'Brien, Patrick K. "The Needham question updated: A historiographical survey and elaboration." *History of Technology* 29.1 (2009): 7-28
<https://www.lse.ac.uk/Economic-History/Assets/Documents/Research/URKEW/Discussion-Paper/3-NeedhamQuestion.pdf>

VI. Communication and Feedback:

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission.

VII. Course AI Policy:

Generative AI may be used to find and evaluate sources of information, but must not be used to compose the essay or cited in the text or as an author of the text.

VIII. Academic Integrity:

The whole University is very serious about upholding academic integrity. Students are required to comply with the Academic Honor Code adopted by the Senate, which is as follows:

- 1) Honesty and integrity are central to the academic work of HKUST. Students of the University must observe and uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty in all the work they do throughout their program of study.
- 2) As members of the University community, you have the responsibility to help maintain the academic reputation of HKUST in its academic endeavors.
- 3) Sanctions will be imposed on students, if they are found to have violated the regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.

For more information, please visit:

<https://registry.hkust.edu.hk/resource-library/regulations-student-conduct-and-academic-integrity>