

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

PG Course Syllabus Template

Modern Chinese History

HMMA 5005

3 credits

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course aims at exploring the political and social history of late Imperial and modern China from the 1800s to early 1940s. A selection of important political events and social phenomena are examined to broaden our knowledge of the late-Qing and Republican politics, society and economy as well as revealing the complexity of historical reality in this period.

Intended Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and understand the post-modernist discourse of historical narrative.
2. Deconstruct the different historiographical traditions in official Chinese history in late-imperial and modern periods.
3. Understand and describe how political persuasions are implanted into official/semi-official narratives of modern historical events.
4. Analyze critically important political events such as the Opium War, Taiping Movement, Western invasion of China, warlordism, the emergence of Chinese nationalism, developments during the Nanjing Decade, the rise of the Chinese Communist Party, etc.
5. Learn and apply the skills of presenting one's arguments in academic seminars and the techniques of writing a history paper properly.

Weekly Schedule and Content:

***Note that the readings listed below are meant to be representative. Further readings may be assigned in particular weeks, along with links to videos to be watched in or outside of class time.**

Week 1 (2 nd February)	Introduction
Week 2 (9 th February)	The Opium Wars and the Late Ching Empire

	<p>Reading: Chapter on The Opium War in <i>Sources in Chinese History : Diverse Perspectives from 1644 to the Present</i> / David G. Atwill, and Yurong Y. Atwill. New York, NY : Routledge, 2021</p>
Week 3 (16 th February)	<p>Hong Kong under British Rule (1841-1997)</p> <p>Reading: Joan Henderson (2001) Heritage, Identity and Tourism in Hong Kong, <i>International Journal of Heritage Studies</i>, 7:3, 219-235</p>
Week 4 (23 rd February)	<p>Republican China (1911-1947)</p> <p>Reading: Donald Asen, chapter "Suspicious Deaths and City Life in Republican Beijing" in <i>Death in Beijing Murder and Forensic Science in Republican China</i> (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U. Press, 2016)</p>
Week 5 (2 nd March)	<p>Paris of the East: Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s</p> <p>Reading: Wen-Hsin Yeh, "Shanghai Modernity: Commerce and Culture in a Republican City", <i>The China Quarterly</i>, No. 150 (1997), pp. 375-394</p>
Week 6 (9 th March)	Fieldtrip
Week 7 (16 th March)	<p>War with Japan, Civil War, and Espionage (1932-1949)</p> <p>Readings: 1. Eileen Cheng, "From the Ashes" https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/rct/renditions/sample/b45.html 2. Background on Eileen Cheng: https://zolimacitymag.com/how-hong-kong-shaped-eileen-chang/</p>
Week 8 (23 rd March)	The Story of Taiwan and In-Class Essay
Week 9 (30 th March)	Mid-Term Quiz and Discussion Session
	<p>Mid-Term Break (3rd-8th Apr)</p> <p>*4th Apr: Ching Ming Festival</p>
Week 10 (13 th April)	<p>Mao's China (1949-1976)</p> <p>Reading: Chang-tai Hung, "The Dance of Revolution: Yangge in Beijing in the early 1950s".</p>
Week 11 (20 th April)	Animals and the Environment in the PRC
Week 12 (27 th April)	Deng's China

	Reading: Chris Courtney, "The Birth of the Cool": Heat and air-conditioning in the history of Wuhan, 1950–2020" in <i>Urban Studies</i> (forthcoming)
Week 13 (4 th May)	Final Presentation and Oral Exam

In-Class Essay:

This is a reflection essay, and students may write their responses to the topics covered between Weeks 1 and 6. Students are however encouraged to make references to the assigned readings.

Mid-Term Quiz and Discussion Session:

Students will be shown 18 images (one at a time) related to the course and will write short responses pertaining to each image. Students will be given five minutes for each image, so the entire quiz takes one and half hours. The Discussion Session, which takes place after the Mid-term Quiz, allows students to express their thoughts/ideas on the topic of their choice.

Final Presentation:

The final presentation will be based on the question: "What do you think "Modern Chinese History" should or should not include, and why?" Inclusion can also refer to what content, theories, methods, and themes we choose to emphasize or de-emphasize, and in the context of our pedagogical goals.

Students will be split into groups, and each group will first give a 20-minute presentation followed by a debate about the groups' arguments.

Oral Exam:

Students will be assessed based on understanding and ability to articulate on the topics covered in the course. Students may use this oral exam to boost or add to their written assignments.

Assessment and Grading

1. Attendance: 10%
2. Class Participation: 25%
3. One In-Class Essay (500-700 words): 15%
4. Mid-term Quiz and Discussion Session: 25%
5. Final Presentation and Oral Exam: 25%

Summary Table

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
In-Class Essay	15%	23/03/2026 *
Mid-Term Quiz and Discussion Session	25%	30/03/2026 *
Final Presentation and Oral Exam	25%	04/05/2026 *

* Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks after the due date.

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	The student is fully engaged in the course. The student demonstrates enthusiasm by reading and critically engaging with the assigned readings and materials. The student also demonstrates creativity in the presentation of new ideas and perspectives.
B	Good Performance	The student shows keen interest in the course by reading and understanding the assigned readings and materials. The student also makes the effort to offer new perspectives and insights.
C	Satisfactory Performance	The student shows an understanding of the assigned readings and materials but does not venture beyond by offering his/her own thoughts or perspectives.
D	Marginal Pass	The student shows a general understanding of the topics covered in the course. The student is generally quiet and participates minimally in class or as a group in the final presentation.
F	Fail	The student shows disinterest in the course and does not participate either in class or as a group in the final presentation.

Course AI Policy

Students may use AI to help them with the assigned readings. For the writing of the in-class essay, students may only use AI for grammar and spell check. Students may not use AI for the creation of content. The instructor will provide more information in Week 1 (Introduction).

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas or email within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will be provided. Students who have further questions about the feedback including marks should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

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.