

HUMA 2470 From Fung Shui to Mao's Villages: City Plans, Urban Politics & the Unseen World of Chinese Villages

3 units, no pre-requisites; Fall 2026, Tuesday/Thursday, 9:00 am – 10:20 am, Rm 4620, Lift 31-32;

Dr. Mian Chen (hmmianchen@ust.hk), office hours by appointment

Course description:

This course surveys the social and cultural transformation of China, focusing on what happened in major cities and rural communities from the Qing Dynasty to contemporary China. The process of modernization, as well as the persistence of tradition, will be studied to redress some of the stereotypical images of Chinese society and culture, both rural and urban. Social conditions and cultural phenomena in Chinese cities and villages in this period are critically analyzed. Topics include analysis of Chinese city plans and their social/political/cultural meanings, development and limitation of civil society in traditional/modern Chinese cities, the role of imperialism in urban development, modernization of urban and rural lives, and the Communist rural revolution. This course will also pay special attention to globalization and the transborder making of Chinese cities.

Required Texts and Materials

No textbooks are required. All readings will be uploaded to Canvas. No Chinese knowledge required.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

1. Evaluate the major historical processes and events that have defined Chinese cities and villages.
2. Examine global networks that have transformed Chinese communities.
3. Situate the development of Hong Kong within the larger context of global Chinese history.
4. Critically analyze primary sources and secondary historical literature to construct well-supported arguments.
5. Apply effective communication skills through analytical writing, presentations, and teamwork.

Assessment and Grading

1. Attendance and Participation: 15%
 2. Quizzes: 60% (three quizzes, 20% each)
 3. Map Quiz: 5%
 4. Presentation based on primary source research: 20%. More details will be announced in class.
- This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing and grades will not be assigned using a curve.*

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
Attendance and Participation	ILO1, ILO2, ILO3, ILO 4, ILO5.	Students learn necessary information through lectures (ILO 1, 2, 3) and participate in source analysis (ILO 4) and discussion (ILO 5).
Quizzes	ILO1, ILO2, ILO3, ILO5.	This task assesses students' ability to understand major events in the history of Chinese cities and villages (ILO 1) and major global connections (ILO 2), as well as major historical events

		that shaped the development of modern Hong Kong (ILO 3). Students will develop analytical writing skills (ILO5).
Map quiz	ILO1.	This task assesses students' ability to identify major cities and villages (ILO 1).
presentation based on primary source research	ILO1, ILO2, ILO3, ILO 4, ILO 5.	This task assesses students' ability to understand major events in Chinese history (ILO 1) and major global connections (ILO 2), as well as major East Asian historical events that shaped modern Hong Kong (ILO 3) through research (ILO 4) and effective presentation (ILO 5).

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of subject matter, expertise in problem-solving, and significant creativity in thinking. Exhibits a high capacity for scholarship and collaboration, going beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.
B	Good Performance	Shows good knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter, competence in problem-solving, and the ability to analyze and evaluate issues. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, competence in dealing with familiar problems, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.
D	Marginal Pass	Has threshold knowledge of core subject matter, potential to achieve key professional skills, and the ability to make basic judgments. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter and lacks the necessary problem-solving skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or analytically and exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for professional practice or development in the discipline.

Course AI Policy

For your presentation assignment, you may use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools for brainstorming and cross-referencing, but you remain entirely responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the materials you present. Because AI models can generate false information, you must independently fact-check all claims, data, and citations against reliable sources. Presenting work containing hallucinated or irrelevant AI-generated materials will result in failing this assignment, as your final presentation must ultimately reflect your own verified research and critical thinking.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include strengths and areas for improvement. 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, and to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The

University has zero tolerance for academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

Accessibility and Academic Accommodations

HKUST is committed to providing equal educational opportunities to all students. If you have a documented disability, a specific learning difficulty, a chronic condition, or a temporary health condition that affects your participation in this course, you are entitled to reasonable academic accommodations. Accommodations are arranged through SEN Support; you can write to sen@ust.hk to arrange a confidential discussion and read [SEN Support](#) for further information.

Mental Well-being

We urge every student to make their mental health a top priority. If necessary, students are strongly encouraged to reach out, talk to someone you trust, and approach the [Counseling and Wellness Center](#).

Course outline:

Part I Late Imperial China

Week 1: Introduction

September 1/September 3

Week 2: Urban Development in Late Imperial China

September 8/September 10

Skinner, G. William. "Urban Development in Imperial China." In G. William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China*. Stanford University Press, 1977, 3–32.

Week 3: Countryside and the Nineteenth-Century Transformation

September 15/September 17 (Map Quiz)

Hsiao, Kung-chuan. "Rural Control in Nineteenth Century China." *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1953): 173–181.

"The Heavenly Kingdom of the Taipings." In Wm. Theodore de Bary & Richard Lufrano, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition II*. Columbia University Press, 2000, 213–230.

Ali, Jason R., and Ronald D. Hill. "Feng Shui and the orientation of traditional villages in the New Territories, Hong Kong, China." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 45 (2005): 27–39.

Week 4: Transpacific Development: Singapore, Hong Kong, San Francisco, Melbourne

September 22/September 24 (Quiz 1)

Read: Ng, Sonia. *Sojourning in Gold Mountain: The Hong Kong Passage*. Hong Kong Museum of History, 2026, 254–269.

Part II Republican China

Week 5: Republican Modernity

September 29

Read: Arlington, L. C. and William Lewisohn. *In Search of Old Peking*. Soul Care Publishing, 2015 [originally 1935], 279–308.

October 1: National Day, no class

Week 6: Kaleidoscopic Colonialism: Manchuria, Shanghai, and Hong Kong

October 6/October 8

Mu Shiying: [上海的狐步舞](#)/English translation: “The Shanghai Foxtrot (a Fragment)”

In class activity: Conversation with Talkie: an LM from 1930.

Week 7: Rural Governance and Rural Reform

October 13/October 15

Short Documentary: Gamble, Sidney. “[Ting Hsien Educational Experiment, 1926-28](#)”

Yao, Hsun-yuan. “The first year of the rural health experiment in Ting Hsien China.” *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly Bulletin*, July 1931: 61–78.

Week 8: The Communist Revolution

October 20/October 22

In class activity: Debate about the origin of the Revolution

“The Communist Revolution.” In Wm. Theodore de Bary & Richard Lufrano, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition II*. Columbia University Press, 2000, 396–425.

Part III Mao Era and the Post-Mao Transformation

Week 9: The Continuous Revolution in the Countryside

October 27([Quiz 2](#))/October 29

Chan, Anita, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger. *Chen Village: Revolution to Globalization, 3rd Edition*. University of California Press, 2009, 41–73.

In class activity: Performing a Struggle Session during the land reform

Week 10: Socialist Cities and the Rural/Urban Divide

November 3/November 5

Wakeman, Frederic. “‘Cleanup’: The New Order in Shanghai.” In Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, ed. *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China*. Harvard University Press, 2007, 21–58.

Week 11: City and Countryside in the Reform Era

November 10/November 12

Chan, Anita, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger. *Chen Village: Revolution to Globalization, 3rd Edition*. University of California Press, 2009, 267–287, 309–329.

In class activity: Design a development plan for a fictional village.

Week 12: Divergence and Entanglement: Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta

November 17/November 19

Zhou, Taomo. “Leveraging liminality: the border town of Bao’an (Shenzhen) and the origins of China’s reform and opening.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 2 (2021): 337–361.

Part IV: Conclusion

Week 13: Twenty-First Century

November 24([Quiz 3](#))/November 26