

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

UG Course Syllabus

Fall 2026

Cultural Sustainability in South China [HUMA2623]

3 Credits

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Course Description

In the past decades, local societies in South China experienced significant changes and many local customs and traditions are disappearing as a result of China's rapid urbanization and economic growth. The sustainability of local cultures has become a major concern. Culture is an important component of sustainable development, as it refers to how we understand and appreciate natural resources and each other. Cultural sustainability requires the recognition of indigenous cultural values and standards, as well as equal rights of the respective communities in policy planning and decision-making, and the engagement of the local community and members of the public. This course adopts an interdisciplinary approach to explore the concept, possibilities, and limits of cultural sustainability. Students are required to conduct field research projects in the Pearl River Delta region, in which they will meet the local residents and have personal fieldwork experience through interviewing and participant observation.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

1. Understand basic terms, concepts, and theories of cultural sustainability through the study of culture and society of South China
2. Develop an appreciation of cultural diversity and understand the possibilities and limits of sustaining local cultures
3. Develop research skills for conducting fieldwork and collecting field data on human culture and society
4. Develop written and oral presentations skills². [intended learning outcome 2]

Assessment and 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.

Assessments:

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
Participation	10%	Ongoing
Tutorial Facilitation	15%	Assigned week
Field Reflection Paper	15%	November 19, 2026
Mid-term examination	30%	October 9, 2026
Group Project	30%	Presentation: Nov 20–27, 2026; Report: Dec 4, 2026

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

AT1: Participation (10%)

Students are expected to be active, prepared, and constructive participants in all lectures and tutorials. This grade reflects consistent attendance and the quality of contributions, which should demonstrate critical engagement with the assigned readings and a willingness to thoughtfully engage with peers' ideas. Effective participation includes asking clarifying questions, building on others' comments, drawing connections to broader course themes, and fostering a collaborative learning environment.

AT2: Tutorial Facilitation (15%)

Students will be organized into 13 groups (approximately 6 students per group, subject to final course enrollment). Each group will be responsible for leading one 20-minute tutorial discussion. The group's facilitation should address the guiding question assigned for that week (see Weekly Schedule), but students are free to select their own case study to ground the discussion. Responsibilities of tutorial facilitators include:

1. Pre-Circulated Brief: Distributing a one-page discussion brief (or a 5-slide deck) at least 24 hours in advance. This brief should: (a) introduce the chosen case study, (b) pose 2–3 critical discussion questions, and (c) connect the case to the core concepts from the week's readings.
2. Session Facilitation: Leading a 20-minute discussion, using prepared questions and any supplementary materials (e.g., a short video clip, images) to stimulate productive conversation.
3. Synthesis: Concluding the session with a summary of key insights that emerged from the discussion.

AT3: Field Reflection Paper (15%)

Following the field trip to Nansha, each student will submit a reflective paper (750–1,000 words) that:

Describes the site and practices observed, drawing on fieldnotes and documentation;

Applies at least one course concept to analyze the experience;

Describes the fieldwork methods used (e.g., observation, interviewing, mapping, archival work) and reflects on challenges encountered;

Reflects on the student's own positionality as an observer;

Raises critical questions for further inquiry.

AT4: Mid-term Exam (30%)

A closed-book, in-class examination (90 minutes) covering materials from Weeks 1–5. The format includes identification questions and short essays. The exam assesses students' grasp of key terms, concepts, theories, and case studies discussed in the first half of the course.

AT5: Group Project (30%)

In the same groups formed for AT2, students will investigate a specific case study related to cultural sustainability in South China. The case study is to be chosen by the group (subject to instructor approval) and must be connected to the overarching themes of the course. The project has two components:

1. Group Presentation (10%): A 15–20 minute presentation, delivered during the presentation sessions (November 20, 23, or 27), followed by a Q&A. The presentation should clearly present the case, analyze it using course concepts, and communicate key findings effectively.
2. Group Report (20%): A written report (~3,000 words), due December 4, 2026. The report should include: (a) a clear introduction and research question; (b) background and context of the chosen case; (c) application of course theories and concepts; (d) critical analysis and independent reflection; (e) a conclusion; and (f) proper citations and a reference list in APA (7th Edition) format.
3. Groups must submit a brief topic proposal (one paragraph) by October 16, 2026 for instructor approval.
4. Formatting: Double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch (2.54 cm) margins.

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
AT1: Participation	ILO1, ILO3	This task assesses students' consistent engagement with course concepts (ILO1) and their participation in fieldwork methods exercises and discussions (ILO3).
AT2: Tutorial Facilitation	ILO1, ILO2, ILO4	This task assesses students' ability to understand and apply course concepts to a case study (ILO1), critically examine cultural sustainability issues (ILO2), and demonstrate oral communication and facilitation skills (ILO4).
AT3: Field Reflection Paper	ILO2, ILO3, ILO4	This task assesses students' ability to critically reflect on cultural diversity and sustainability (ILO2), apply fieldwork methods and document their research process (ILO3), and communicate their analysis in writing (ILO4).
AT4: Mid-term Exam	ILO1, ILO2	This task assesses students' foundational understanding of key concepts and theories (ILO1) and their ability to critically engage with

		debates on sustaining local cultures (ILO2).
AT5: Group Project	ILO2, ILO3, ILO4	The presentation and report assess students' ability to analyze cultural sustainability issues through a concrete case (ILO2), apply research skills (ILO3), and communicate findings effectively in oral and written forms (ILO4).

Grading Rubrics

AT2: Tutorial Facilitation Rubric

Criterion	Weight	Excellent (A)	Good (B)	Satisfactory (C)	Marginal (D)	Fail (F)
Pre-Circulated Brief	25%	Brief is clearly structured, thoughtfully connects the case to course concepts, and poses insightful discussion questions that invite debate.	Brief is well-organized, makes clear connections to course concepts, and poses relevant discussion questions.	Brief is adequate but may lack depth in conceptual connections or pose questions that are too narrow.	Brief is poorly organized, with weak or unclear connections to course concepts and superficial questions.	Brief is missing, very late, or fails to meet basic requirements.
Facilitation Quality	45%	Skillfully guides discussion, engages multiple classmates, responds adaptively, and creates an inclusive and intellectually stimulating environment.	Leads discussion effectively, engages several classmates, and maintains focus on key themes.	Leads discussion adequately but may rely heavily on scripted questions, with limited responsiveness to peers' contributions.	Struggles to lead discussion; lacks direction or fails to engage classmates.	Cannot facilitate or does not attempt meaningful facilitation.
Synthesis	30%	Provides a nuanced and insightful summary that draws together multiple threads of discussion and connects them to broader course themes.	Provides a clear summary of key insights from the discussion and makes relevant connections to course themes.	Provides a basic summary but lacks depth or misses some key points raised.	Summary is superficial or misrepresents the discussion.	No synthesis or entirely irrelevant summary.

AT3: Field Reflection Paper Rubric

Criterion	Weight	Excellent (A)	Good (B)	Satisfactory (C)	Marginal (D)	Fail (F)
Description & Observation	20%	Vivid, detailed, and well-organized description that brings the site and experience to life; effective use of fieldnotes.	Clear and detailed description with good use of fieldnotes.	Adequate description but may lack detail or coherence.	Description is vague or poorly organized.	Little to no meaningful description.
Conceptual Application	30%	Insightfully applies course concept(s) to analyze the experience; demonstrates sophisticated understanding of theory-practice connections.	Applies course concept(s) appropriately and makes clear connections to the fieldwork experience.	Applies concept(s) but connections may be superficial or partially inaccurate.	Concept is mentioned but not meaningfully applied.	No course concept is applied or the application is incorrect.
Methodological Reflection	25%	Critically reflects on fieldwork methods used, including specific challenges, ethical considerations, and positionality.	Reflects on fieldwork methods and identifies challenges and positionality.	Mentions methods and positionality but lacks critical depth.	Superficial mention of methods; no reflection on positionality.	No methodological reflection.
Critical Questions	15%	Raises thoughtful, original questions that demonstrate intellectual curiosity and point toward further inquiry.	Raises relevant questions for further inquiry.	Raises questions but they are generic or underdeveloped.	Questions are absent or trivial.	No questions raised.
Writing Quality	10%	Elegant, clear, and well-organized prose with no significant errors.	Clear, well-organized writing with minor errors.	Adequate writing; some organizational or grammatical issues.	Writing is difficult to follow with frequent errors.	Writing is incoherent or unreadable.

AT5: Group Project Rubric**Group Presentation (10%)**

Criterion	Weight	Excellent (A)	Good (B)	Satisfactory (C)	Marginal (D)	Fail (F)
Content & Analysis	40%	Demonstrates deep understanding of the case; sophisticated application of course concepts; clear and compelling argument.	Demonstrates solid understanding and appropriate application of concepts; clear argument.	Adequate understanding; some conceptual application but analysis may lack depth.	Limited understanding; weak application of concepts.	Demonstrates little to no understanding of the case or course concepts.
Organization & Clarity	25%	Exceptionally well-organized presentation; logical flow; excellent time management.	Well-organized presentation with clear structure and good time management.	Adequate organization but may be uneven or run over/under time.	Disorganized or unclear; poor time management.	No discernible structure.
Engagement & Delivery	20%	All group members deliver confidently and engagingly; effective use of visuals; handles Q&A skillfully.	Most members deliver clearly; good use of visuals; handles Q&A adequately.	Uneven delivery across members; visuals are basic; Q&A handled with difficulty.	Poor delivery; visuals absent or distracting; cannot handle Q&A.	Delivery is incomprehensible or no meaningful presentation.
Collaboration	15%	Clear evidence of well-integrated teamwork; seamless transitions between members.	Good teamwork evident; smooth transitions.	Some evidence of collaboration but transitions may be awkward.	Little evidence of collaboration; disjointed presentation.	No evidence of collaboration.

Group Report (20%)

Criterion	Weight	Excellent (A)	Good (B)	Satisfactory (C)	Marginal (D)	Fail (F)
Research & Scholarship	25%	Extensive and thoughtful engagement with relevant scholarly literature; excellent use of sources beyond assigned readings.	Good engagement with relevant literature; appropriate use of assigned and additional sources.	Adequate use of sources but may rely too heavily on a few references or lack breadth.	Limited engagement with scholarly literature; over-reliance on non-academic sources.	Little to no engagement with scholarly literature.
Critical Analysis & Argument	30%	Sophisticated, original analysis; clear and compelling thesis; insightful application of course concepts.	Clear thesis and coherent analysis; appropriate application of course concepts.	Basic thesis and analysis; some application of concepts but may lack depth.	Weak or unclear thesis; superficial analysis; limited conceptual application.	No clear thesis or analysis; concepts are absent or misapplied.
Originality & Reflection	20%	Demonstrates independent thought and critical perspective; goes beyond summarizing to offer genuine insight.	Shows some independent thought and critical reflection.	Limited originality; mostly descriptive rather than analytical.	Little to no original thought; purely descriptive.	No evidence of independent thinking.
Structure & Academic Writing	15%	Logically organized with clear sections; elegant and precise academic prose.	Well-organized; clear and correct academic writing.	Adequate organization; writing is generally clear with some errors.	Poor organization; frequent writing errors that impede clarity.	Disorganized and poorly written.
APA Formatting & Citations	10%	Flawless APA formatting; complete and accurate reference list.	Minor APA errors; mostly complete references.	Several APA errors; some missing references.	Major APA errors; incomplete references.	No consistent citation format or no references.

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of cultural sustainability concepts and theories. Critically and creatively synthesizes course materials with independent research. Writes with clarity, precision, and insight. Actively and constructively contributes to class discussions and collaborative work. Goes beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.
B	Good Performance	Shows solid knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter. Demonstrates competence in applying concepts to case analysis. Communicates effectively in written and oral formats. Displays consistent motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter. Shows satisfactory ability to apply concepts to familiar cases. Communicates at a functional level with some room for improvement in clarity and depth. Demonstrates effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.
D	Marginal Pass	Has threshold knowledge of core subject matter. Shows limited ability to apply concepts or communicate arguments effectively. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline with further effort.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter. Lacks the ability to apply concepts or communicate arguments. Shows minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for the discipline.

Course AI Policy

Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, DeepSeek) may be used for brainstorming, drafting assistance, and language editing. However, all substantive ideas, arguments, analyses, and conclusions must be the student's own work. When AI tools are used in the preparation of any assessment task, students must include a brief acknowledgement statement at the end of the submission specifying: (a) which tool(s) were used, (b) for what purpose, and (c) how the output was critically evaluated and integrated. Unacknowledged use of generative AI, or submission of AI-generated content as one's own original work, constitutes a breach of academic integrity.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas 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.

Resubmission Policy

Five points (out of 100) will be deducted per day for late submission of any written assignment, unless an extension has been granted by the instructor in advance due to documented medical or extenuating circumstances.

Required Texts and Materials

All required readings will be available through the course Canvas site or placed on library reserve. Specific weekly readings will be detailed in the weekly schedule. Students are expected to complete the assigned reading before the first lecture session of each week, as they form the basis for both lectures and tutorial discussions.

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.

Additional Information

Teaching medium: The primary language of instruction for this course is Mandarin, with reading materials provided in both English and Chinese.

Fieldwork Logistics: The field trip to Nansha is a required component of the course. Students who require a visa or entry permit to enter Mainland China must make arrangements well in advance. Further logistical details will be provided in due course.

Group Formation: Students will self-organize into 13 groups of approximately 6 members each by the end of Week 2. Students who have not joined a group by the deadline will be assigned to one by the instructor.