

SOCI 4208

Cultural Sociology

Prof. Chan Hoi-Man
(陳海文教授)
Dept. of Sociology
CUHK

Introduction:

It is hardly deniable that social life in Hong Kong, and in the modern world in general, is saturated with cultural forces and phenomena of one kind or another. At one extreme, the prevalence and influence of popular culture is seen by its critics to be responsible for much of the crises and decline of modernity. Whereas at the other extreme, the remarkable expansion of education institutions and information networks seem to signify a heightened level of cultural literacy and civility. For better or worse, the presence of culture underlines much of the development and dynamics of modern society, in Hong Kong as elsewhere. And yet the character and meaning of 'culture' remains notoriously elusive to pin down.

The purpose of this course is to examine more closely the centrality and the use of culture in social life. In intellectual terms, and on top of the empirical scenarios already depicted, this general agenda has become all the more pertinent since the alleged 'cultural turn' of Western social sciences in the late-1970's, marking the new state-of-the-art development of social-scientific analyses. It is in this context that one may situate the recent-sociological currents as 'interpretive sociology', 'qualitative sociology', 'reflexive sociology', 'symbolic anthropology', 'new ethnography', and even 'post-modern sociology'. In one way or another, these intellectual/sociological currents are all tied in with the concerted effort to supersede the dominance of a somewhat positivistic, socio-structural perspective, by virtue of the creative and liberating potential of a cultural vantage point. Such potentials of the cultural domain would also be especially appealing on the empirical plane, when various political, ideological, or even revolutionary programmes for social transformation have all been proven ineffectual.

The pursuit of cultural sociology therefore embodies far-reaching scholarly and practical implications, in the reassertion of the cultural domain in the shaping of social life. On the intellectual side, cultural factors and dynamics can be variously introduced and deployed as interpretive rubrics, explanatory variables, methodological framework, guiding ideas, and so on. Whereas in practical terms, it is not uncommon in these days to encounter notions such as culture as resistance, culture as reflexivity, cultural critique, or cultural movement at large. Viewed in these interactive lights, cultural sociology can be taken as an alternative framework, even paradigm of sociology per se. In other words, cultural sociology may well

indicate not simply a sub-field of sociology as such, but the coming transformation of the latter as a whole.

This very comprehensiveness and dynamism of cultural sociology places particular burden and requirement upon this course. It may also explain why, for similar courses in most other universities, a seminar format proves to be more versatile and effective. The understanding, experience and deployment of culture cannot be adequately conveyed only by means of the conventional lecturing format. Participation must instead be strongly encouraged, rethinking personal cultural experiences and relevance whether in the unraveling of competing cultural theories and approaches, or in relating them to the empirical cultural dynamics of social life.

With the stage thus set, and depending on class size, some flexibilities can be allowed for in the actual format and conduct of the seminars, yet active student participation—in the form of presentation, discussion and research paper—will be essential. This emphasis on experience and process is what distinguished cultural sociology from other mainstream social sciences approaches. A tentative outline of the seminar topics is given below. A more precise schedule will take into account the actual number and interests of the participants concerned.

Tentative Outline:

A. Introduction

Week One: What is Culture/Cultural Sociology?

B. Traditions

Week Two: Culture and Life-order

Week Three: Culture and Social Solidarity

Week Four: Culture and Superstructure

Week Five: Culture and Group Dynamics

C. Cultural Formations

Week Six: The System of Culture

Week Seven: The Reproduction of Culture

D. Cultural Methodologies

Week Eight: The Research of Culture

Week Nine: The Interpretation of Culture

Week Ten: The Critique of Culture

E. Cultural Practices

Week Eleven: Culture as Repertoire

Week Twelve: Culture as Resistance

Week Thirteen: Culture as Seduction

F. Conclusion

Week Fourteen: Culture and Beyond

Course Requirement/ Assessment:

In general, members of the class are expected to read and master reading assignments for each session, and to participate actively during the seminar discussion and presentation. The presentation will be on the seminar readings and preferably how they relate to cultural issues of interest to the groups. If everything goes well, in other words, all members of the class would have the opportunity to make presentations on a cultural perspective and a relevant empirical cultural domain, as well as to participate actively in class discussion. The written assignments of the course include a mid-term review paper on selected assigned readings, and a final paper focusing on the application of cultural perspectives. The assessment scheme is as follows:

- Presentation: 15%
- In-class Discussion: 15%
- Mid-term Review Paper: 20%
- Final Paper: 50%
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Texts and Reading Assignments:

For weekly reading assignments, separate detailed reading lists will be provided. As for the final paper, members of the class are also expected to look for literature and data specific to their chosen topic. Consultation with the instructors will be arranged. For those of you who wish to locate representative literatures in the field, the following anthologies are recommended:

Alexander, J. & Seidman, S. (1992), ed. Culture and Society, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jenks, C. (2003), ed. Culture: Critical Concepts in Sociology, London: Routledge Press.

Long, E. (1997), ed. From Sociology to Cultural Studies, Oxford: Blackwell Press.

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>. With each assignment, students will be required to submit a statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

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Bibliography

Professor: CHAN, Hoiman

(Note: Readings marked with * are required readings.)

A. Introduction

Week 1: Culture/Cultural Sociology:

- * Alexander, J. (1990), "Introduction" in Alexander, J. and Seidman, S. (1990), ed. Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Long, E. (1997), "Introduction" in Long, E (1997), ed. From Sociology to Cultural Studies : new perspectives, Malden, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers.
- Spillman, L. (2002), "Introduction" in Spillman, L. (2002), ed. Cultural Sociology, Malden, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers.

B. Traditions

Week 2: Culture and Life Order:

- Schluchter, W. (1981), The Rise of Western Rationalism, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schroeder, R. (1992), Max Weber's Sociology of Culture, New York: Sage Publications.
- * Weber, M. (1989), The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, London : Unwin Hyman.

Week 3: Culture and Social Solidarity

- Alexander, J. (1988), ed. Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- * Durkheim, E. and Mauss, M. (1963), Primitive Classification, London : Cohen & West. (excerpt)
- * Durkheim, E. (1995), The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, New York : Free Press. (excerpt)

Week 4: Culture and Superstructure

- * Gramsci, A. "Culture of Ideological Hegemony" in Alexander, J. and Seidman, S. (1990), ed. Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates, Cambridge; New York:

Cambridge University Press.

- Lukács, G. (1972), History and Class Consciousness, London: Merlin Press.
- Thompson, E.P. “Rituals of Mutuality” in Alexander, J. and Seidman, S. (1990), ed. Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- * Marx, K. “These on Feuerbach” and excerpts from “German Ideology”.

Week 5: Culture and Group Dynamics

- * Simmel, G. “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, in Spillman, L. (2002), ed. Cultural Sociology, Malden, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers.
- Simmel, G (1997), Simmel on Culture :Selected Writings, London : Sage Publications.
- Wirth, L. (1938) “Urbanism as a way of life”, in American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 44, P 1-24.

C. Cultural Formation

Week 6: The System of Culture

- Benedict, R. (1959) Patterns of Culture, Boston : Houghton Mifflin.
- * Parsons, T. and Shils, E. “Values and Social System” in Alexander, J. and Seidman, S. (1990), ed. Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shils, E. (1982) “Centre and Periphery” in The Constitution of Society, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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Week 7: The Reproduction of Culture

- Bourdieu, P. (1984), Distinction, Cambridge; Harvard University Press.
- * Bourdieu, P. “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction” in Jenks, C. (2003), ed. Culture : Critical Concepts in Sociology, Vol. III, London, Routledge Press.
- Willis, P. (1977), Learning to labour, Farnborough, Eng. : Saxon House.

D. Cultural Methodologies

Week 8: The Research of Culture

- Crane, D. (1994), ed. The Sociology of Culture, Oxford: Blackwell.
- * Smith, P. (1998), “Introduction” in Smith, P. (1998), ed. The New American Cultural Sociology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Lamont, M. & Fournier, M. ed. (1992), Cultivating Differences, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 9: The Interpretation of Culture

- * Geertz, C. (1973), “Thick Description” and “Deep Play” in The Interpretation of Culture, New York: Basic Books.
- Goffman, E. (1959), The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, New York: Double Day.

Week 10: The Critique of Culture

- Adorno, T. “Culture Industry Reconsidered” in Alexander, J. and Seidman, S. (1990), ed. Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- * Horkheimer, M. & Adorno, T. (1972), “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in Dialectics of Enlightenment, New York: Continuum Books.
- Swingewood, A. “The Theory of Mass Society” in Jenks, C. (2003), ed. Culture : Critical Concepts in Sociology, Vol. II, London, Routledge Press.

E. Cultural Practices

Week 11: Culture as Repertoire

- Lamont, M. & Thevenot, L. ed. (2000), Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- * Swidler, A. (1986), “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” in American Sociological Review, #51: 273-86.
- Swidler, A. “Cultural Power and Social Movement” in Spillman, L. (2002), ed. Cultural Sociology, Malden, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers.

Week 12: Culture as Resistance

- * Foucault, M. The History of Sexuality, Vol. I, Pantheon Books : New York. (excerpt)
- Scott, J. (1995), Domination and the Art of Resistance, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Week 13: Culture as Seduction

- * Poster, M. (1988) ed., Baudrillard: Selected Writings, Cambridge: Polity Press. (excerpt)
- Kellner, D. (1994) ed. Baudrillard : a critical reader, Oxford: Blackwell