

**THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**  
**Department of Sociology**  
**SOCI 3239 Environment and Society**  
**Second Term 2025-26**

Instructor: Dr. LI Hang 李鏗  
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Office: Sino Building 432  
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Time: 2:30 pm-4:15 pm (Wednesday)  
Venue: CKB 109  
Course website:  
<https://blackboard.cuhk.edu.hk/>

Teaching assistants:

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### ***Course Description***

This course provides a framework for understanding the relationship between human societies and the physical environment. It introduces students to research in environmental sociology and explores how sociological perspectives illuminate the ways human activity has contributed to the current ecological crisis. The course presents a broad spectrum of theoretical perspectives used by environmental sociologists to analyze and evaluate efforts to mitigate global and local environmental problems. It also promotes awareness and understanding of the Sustainable Development Goal framework, encouraging reflection on how individuals and societies can work together to address environmental challenges.

### ***Learning Outcomes***

After completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Analyze and compare major theoretical approaches in environmental sociology
2. Apply conceptual tools to examine how social institutions could mitigate or exacerbate environmental problems
3. Evaluate claims related to environmental and natural resource issues from environmentalists, the business sector, and policymakers

### ***Course Syllabus***

- Introduction
- Does Sociology have an ecological blind spot?
- Major Theoretical Approaches
  - Ecological Modernization
  - Eco-Marxism
  - Ecologically Unequal Exchange (EUE) Theory
  - World Society
  - Environmental Justice
- What are the main drivers of environmental problems?
- Can individual efforts reduce ecological impact?
- Can we decouple economic growth and ecological impact?
- Less is More? Degrowth as a concept and a movement

### ***Course Components***

The lecturer will conduct all lectures in person, as scheduled below. Students will also meet with the teaching assistant for tutorials approximately every two weeks. **Students should reserve two time slots for tutorials, in addition to their lecture times.** The teaching assistant will schedule tutorial times at the beginning of the term.

A 3-unit course typically includes about 39 hours of classroom time and 78-107 hours of self-study. With 2-3 hours for assessment, students should expect to spend a total of 117-146 hours on a 3-unit course.

<b>Teaching Modes and Learning Activities</b>	
<b>On-site face-to-face</b>	<b>Percentage of time</b>
<i>Lectures</i>	18%
<i>Tutorials</i>	9%
<i>Assessments and Self-study Hours</i>	73%

### ***Course Schedule***

Week	Date	Topic
1	Jan 7	Introduction
2	Jan 14	Does Sociology have an ecological blind spot?
3	Jan 21	Theoretical Approaches (1): Ecological Modernization
4	Jan 28	Theoretical Approaches (2): Eco-Marxism
5	Feb 4	Theoretical Approaches (3): EUE Theory
6	Feb 11	Theoretical Approaches (4): World Society
No class	Feb 18	<i>Public Holiday</i>
7	Feb 25	Theoretical Approaches (5): Environmental Justice
No class	Mar 6	<i>Reading Week</i>
8	Mar 11	What are the main drivers of environmental problems?
9	Mar 18	Can we decouple economic growth and ecological impact?
10	Mar 25	Invited Talk (1)
11	Apr 1	Can individual efforts reduce ecological impact?
12	Apr 8	Invited Talk (2)
13	Apr 15	Less is More? Degrowth as a concept and a movement

### ***Assessment Type and Percentage***

(I) Tutorial Participation    25%

(II) Tutorial Paper            30%

(III) Final Paper                45%

## Assessment Rubrics

### Grade Descriptors (Course Level)

Grade	Grade Descriptors (aligned to LO1-LO3)
A	Excellent performance on all learning outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· LO1: Shows deep understanding of all five theories (ecological modernization, eco-Marxism, ecologically unequal exchange, world society, and environmental justice). Makes clear comparisons and combines frameworks while recognizing their strengths and limits.</li><li>· LO2: Applies concepts effectively to state, market, and civil society. Explains how institutions help or harm the environment, and discusses trade-offs and unexpected outcomes.</li><li>· LO3: Carefully evaluates claims from environmentalists, business, and policymakers using strong evidence. Considers opposing views and separates facts from opinions. Conclusions are clear, fair, and context-aware.</li></ul>
A-	Very strong performance on most learning outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· LO1: Very good comparisons across theories with only small gaps.</li><li>· LO2: Strong application to institutions with clear explanations; some trade-offs less fully explored.</li><li>· LO3: Thoughtful evaluation of stakeholder claims with minor gaps in addressing opposing views.</li></ul>
B+ / B / B-	Good overall performance, or strong performance in some areas balancing weaker areas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· LO1: Good understanding of each theory; comparisons mostly accurate but sometimes more descriptive than analytical.</li><li>· LO2: Appropriate use of concepts; reasoning present but not always fully developed.</li><li>· LO3: Reasonable evaluation using relevant evidence; limited discussion of opposing views or outside sources.</li></ul>
C+ / C / C-	Adequate performance on most outcomes, with clear weaknesses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· LO1: Basic understanding of theories; comparisons shallow or sometimes incorrect.</li><li>· LO2: Mostly descriptive application to institutions; explanations unclear or incomplete.</li><li>· LO3: Evaluations use limited evidence and miss counter-evidence; conclusions weakly supported.</li></ul>
D+ / D	Minimal acceptable performance on several outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· LO1: Incomplete understanding of theories; comparisons incorrect or missing.</li><li>· LO2: Incorrect application of concepts with weak connection to institutions.</li><li>· LO3: Little or no supported evaluation of stakeholder claims; major gaps and unbalanced conclusions.</li></ul>