

HH 3045 Cold War in Asia: Transnational and Micro Approaches

Module Convenor: Dr. Florence Mok

Time: Every Monday, 12:30-15:20

Venue: LHS-TR +53

Course Description:

This module explores the history of the Cold War in Asia, using a micro and transnational approach. Before the 2000s, most historical research on the Cold War was either American-centric or Euro-centric. The non-Western world, in particular East Asia, a ‘fault-line region’ (Major and Mitter), was under-studied. The history of the Cold War, therefore, was asymmetrical. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent opening of archives in former colonies enabled the reconstruction of Cold War history in East and Southeast Asia in a broad historical context, connecting them with China, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union (now Russia).

Adopting a micro and transnational approach, this course uses Hong Kong, a ‘Cold War pivot,’ as a starting point to trace how ideas were disseminated transborder and how big powers’ activities in the colony affected how the Cold War unfolded in territories/countries in East and Southeast Asia. Ever since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Hong Kong, a British colony, was a battleground for competing ideologies: communism and capitalism. Hong Kong was relatively liberal as a colony. Economically, the principle of ‘laissez-faire’ was adopted by the colonial regime. Politically, despite the absence of democracy, the colonial government introduced the City District Officer Scheme to solicit public opinion. Socially, the state propagated the idea of freedom of speech, press, assembly and religion. As an alien administration that ruled over two million Chinese residents in the immediate post-war period, the colonial government constantly faced a problem of legitimacy and was susceptible to communist infiltration. The Chinese Communist Party participated in Hong Kong life and used its base in the territory to encourage the uptake of radical ideas throughout Asia. In addition, the United States Information Services and the Nationalists disseminated propaganda to overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia using its representatives and secret operatives in Hong Kong. Hong Kong also played an important role during conflicts. For example, through Hong Kong, strategic goods were first shipped to Korea during the Korean War despite the trade embargo. Such development also facilitated Hong Kong’s industrialization in the post-war period. And Hong Kong was a shelter for Vietnamese refugees during the Vietnam War. In theory, under British liberal legal traditions, the administration sought to create a permissive environment for social movements to propagate ideas that were critical of colonialism and capitalism. In practice, the colonial state monitored radicalism closely and repressed it using all possible means. The approach adopted by the colonial government in handling these Cold War activities in Hong Kong influenced how the Cold War unfolded in Asia.

Through this course, students can also learn about the transnational network: how ideas, ruling strategies, and technologies flowed and exchanged transnationally, and how people moved across the borders. Both high diplomacy and local activities will be explored. Students

can then identify similarities and differences in Cold War experiences between the East and the West, setting up a transnational comparative framework for further studies.

Module Learning Outcomes:

- Examine sources and analyze existing literature to develop comprehensive knowledge of the Cold War in Asia, in particular Hong Kong.
- Apply micro and transnational historical approaches to the study of the Cold War.
- Distinguish, compare and contrast the patterns of Cold War activities in different territories in East and Southeast Asia.
- Evaluate the usefulness and limitations of existing methods, and enhance communication skills through writing and presentations.

Module Organization:

The module is divided into four elements, which map onto the mode of assessment: We pool knowledge and debate the history of the Cold War. We examine how the Cold War affected Hong Kong's political, social and economic development, and how these activities influenced how the Cold War unfolded in other parts of Asia. These slots will be organized as seminars and small discussion groups, creating a foundation for four different assessments: class participation; the annotated bibliography; the gobbet test; and the assessed essay of 4,000 words.

1. Class Participation (10%)

Each student should present once throughout the semester. The presentation and class participation will count towards the final grade. Inability to deliver the presentation in the arranged slot will result in a mark penalty. Attendance and class participation will also count towards the final grade.

2. Annotated Bibliography (20%)

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy and quality of the sources cited. It is due in **Week 7 (23 February 2026)**.

3. Quiz: Gobbet Analysis (30%)

Practices of gobbet analysis run from Week 3 to 10 on each topic. At the end of the term, there will be a gobbet paper quiz, which consists of 6 questions. You need to choose 3 out of 6 to answer.

The gobbet questions will be based on the six themes taught in this course:

1. Changing approaches in studying the Cold War

2. Hong Kong's strategic significance during the Cold War
3. Cold War local activities in Hong Kong (PRC, ROC and US)
4. Water as a biopolitical weapon
5. East and Southeast Asia and Hong Kong during the Cold War
6. The Vietnam War and Vietnamese Refugees in Hong Kong

The quiz will be in **Week 12 (6 April 2026)**.

4. Assessed Essay Work (40%)

This element runs through the whole year and involves independent learning. Students must choose a topic of Cold War history in Hong Kong and Asia to be researched during the year. They have to demonstrate their understanding of the transnational aspects of Cold War history in Asia. They could either study transnational networks in Hong Kong during the Cold War or compare Hong Kong with at least one other polity. This 4,000-word essay is due at the end of the semester. Under my guidance, you will craft an assessed essay question and deploy published sources to answer it. **(Due 22 April 2026)**

Teaching Programme:

Week	Discussion Group	Learning Focus
1	Briefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate tasks and prepare presentations • Understand the structure of the course and its assessments
2	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up the module • Introduce students to the course structure • Assign presentations and tasks • Introduce students to the approaches and methods of transnational and microhistory • Present the basic literature on the Cold War and the changing approaches used in studying it
3	Importance of Hong Kong in Geopolitics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the importance of the British colony in geopolitics and why it became a battleground for the Chinese Communists, the Nationalists and the United States during the Cold War
4	Ideological Conflict or Economic Competition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the nature of the Cold War in Hong Kong; in essence, determine whether it was an ideological conflict, a power struggle between countries or economic competition • Investigate the developments of the governments of Mainland China, Taiwan, Britain and the United States in the immediate post-war period, and how these affected their strategies to expand influence in Hong Kong

5	High Diplomacy: Changing Sino-British and Anglo-American Relations during the Cold War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine how Sino-British and Anglo-American relations shifted during different periods of the Cold War • Analyze the different considerations behind the British and colonial governments in handling security issues and the presence of foreign intervention in Hong Kong
6	Chinese Communist United Front Work in the Labour Sector and Cultural Infiltration in Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine how Chinese Communists expanded their influence in the labour sector, mainly through the Federation of Trade Unions • Analyze notable strikes initiated by leftists in the colonial era, including the Tramways Workers Strike in the 1950s and the 1967 riots, and how the colonial government countered them • Explore Chinese Communist penetration in the cultural domain, particularly through newspapers, literature, traditional cultural activities and education • Discuss how the colonial regime monitored and suppressed these activities and whether it adhered to the concept of the ‘rule of law’ •
7	Right-wing Influence and the United States Information Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate the strategies used by the Nationalists to counter communist ideologies in Hong Kong • Explore, in particular, how the cultural domain was influenced by right-wing writers and educators • Discuss how the United States Information Service supported the production and dissemination of anti-communist propaganda in the British colony
8	Water as a Biopolitical Weapon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine how the CCP used water as a biopolitical weapon in the Cold War context • Explore how the colonial government and Britain formulated Hong Kong’s water policy in response to changing geopolitical and local developments
9	Korean War, Links with Malaya and Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore how the Korean War affected Cold War dynamics in the East Asia region and how it facilitated Hong Kong’s industrialisation • Trace the transnational network the CCP utilised to disseminate Cold War propaganda to

		overseas Chinese in Malaya and Singapore through Hong Kong
10	Vietnam War and Vietnamese Refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the background of the Vietnam War • Explore how Hong Kong became a haven for Vietnamese refugees in the 1960s and 1970s, and how, through the colony, these people later emigrated to the US and Britain • Understand the strategies adopted by different governments to control the influx of Vietnamese refugees into their countries •
11	Holiday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No class
12	Quiz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-hour gobbet quiz
13	Tutor Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one tutor meeting to discuss topics of the final essays

Assessment:

- Class participation and presentation (10%)
- An annotated bibliography (20%)
- A gobbet quiz (30%)
- A 4,000-word essay (40%)

Essential Key Text:

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1. Ang Cheung Guan, *Southeast Asia's Cold War: An Interpretative History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018).
 2. John Carroll and Priscilla Roberts, eds., *Hong Kong in the Cold War* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016).
 3. Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
 4. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vols. 1–3: *Origins; Crisis and Détente; Endings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
 5. Peter Lowe, *Containing the Cold War in East Asia: British Policies towards Japan, China and Korea, 1948–53* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).
 6. Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, eds., *Across the Blocs: Exploring Comparative Cold War Cultural and Society History* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).
 7. Chi-kwan Mark, *The Everyday Cold War: Britain and China* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).
 8. Chi-kwan Mark, *Hong Kong and the Cold War: Anglo-American Relations 1949–1957* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
 9. Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).