

History Program
Academic Year 2025-2026, Semester 1

HH3003
Migration and Diaspora:
Chinese Experiences in Comparative Perspective

Academic Units: 3 AUs
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Content

“Diaspora” has become a buzzword in the last decades—with scholars referring to the proliferation of the term as a “diaspora diaspora”—but what do we mean when we talk about “diaspora”? Is there such a thing as a “Chinese diaspora” or should we, as some critics argue, avoid the term altogether? Why do some scholars use terms such as “overseas Chinese” and “Chinese overseas” and what do these terms imply? In this course, we will critically engage with different research paradigms to study the movement of those who identify and/or are identified as “Chinese” to Southeast Asia, the Americas and Europe, and we will place these developments within a broader historical and comparative framework.

We will first outline the broader historical patterns of migration, focusing on traders in Southeast Asia, mass migration since the mid-nineteenth century, migration after 1945, and the rise of the “new migrants” after 1978. Following this, we will analyze distinct migration patterns in more detail: Why and when did Chinese migrate to regions such as Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Europe and what other migrations occurred concurrently? Apart from local and global structural factors, what policies existed in both the host societies and in China and how did this affect the formation of Chinese communities? This brings us to the third area of interest, namely the organizational aspects of Chinese communities. How did community organizations materialize in different contexts? How did they change over time and how relevant are they today? Finally, we will address questions of identity, representation, and self-representation in film, TV series, and literature. Throughout the course, we will engage with various types of primary sources, including cartoons, photographs, novels, films, magazines, and historical artefacts.

Learning Objectives

- (1) Compare and contrast the major historical approaches and theories in the field;
- (2) Investigate and explain Chinese migration patterns and their relation to regional and global developments and other concurrent migration patterns;
- (3) Apply theoretical models to the development of Chinese communities in various geographical regions;
- (4) Analyze and interpret representations and self-representations of Chinese communities using primary and secondary sources;
- (5) Formulate, articulate, and present historical arguments based on own research, both individually and in group.

Course Outline (Subject to Change)

S/N	Topic	Seminar Hours
	<i>PART I: Macro-Overview</i>	
1	Introduction	3
2	What's in a name? Changing approaches and concepts	3
3	Broad historical overview (1500s-today)	3
4	Community organizations (<i>huiguan</i> , secret societies)	3
5	Migration politics and policies	3
	<i>PART II: Communities around the Globe</i> [as part of this section, we will either visit the Baba House, the Peranakan Museum, or the Chinese Heritage Centre exhibition, depending on everyone's class schedules]	
6	Geographical dispersion I Southeast Asia	3
7	Geographical dispersion II the Americas	3
8	Geographical dispersion III Europe	3
9	Representation and self-representation	3
	<i>PART III: Group Work</i>	
10	Group presentation workshopping and consultation	3
11	Group presentations I	3

12	Group presentations II (depending on class size; if the group is smaller, we will either discuss a topic of your choice or move the revision forward)	
13	Revision and wrap up	3

Assessment

Online Participation and Group Discussion	10%
Individual Class Participation	10%
Field Trip Research and Write-Up	20%
Paper Outline	10%
Group Presentation	20%
Research Paper	30%

Assessment Component 1 – Online Participation (Discussion Board) and Group Discussion 10%:

To prepare for the discussion, you need to post weekly on the discussion board. The individual discussion board posts are then used for small group discussion (peer-to-peer learning) in class. In the individual post and the contributions to the group discussions, you need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the basic themes and interpretations in the readings. You need to be able to formulate your own arguments based on a critical reading of both the primary and secondary sources assigned for that week.

Assessment Component 2 – Individual Class Participation 10%

In addition to the weekly group discussion exercise, your individual contributions to other discussions will count for 10% of the mark. In these individual contributions, you need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the basic themes and interpretations in the readings. You need to be able to formulate your own arguments based on a critical reading of both the primary and secondary sources assigned for that week.

Assessment Component 3 – Field Trip Research and Write-Up 20%

10% group mark (see below); 10% individual mark

For the field trip, you will be divided into small groups and you will submit a write-up per group. Each member of the group will be responsible for one aspect/section of the write-up. For this, you need to critically apply concepts and themes as presented in the readings to narratives as presented in museum exhibits. Although each group member is responsible for one specific aspect of the write-up, you should also coordinate the write-up as a group and make sure that you have an overarching main point. You will hence receive both an individual and a group mark.

Assessment will be based on the following components:

- 1) Organization (20%)
- 2) Analysis (30%)
- 3) Use of sources (30%)
- 4) Teamwork (10%)
- 5) Presentation Format (10%)

Assessment Component 4 – Paper Outline 10%

You need to submit an outline in which you present your research question, a short literature review and overview of primary sources to be used, the research methodology, and a list of references. More details will be provided in the syllabus and separately.

Assessment Component 5 – Group presentation 20%

10% group mark (see below); 10% individual mark (individual presentation performance graded by instructors)

Building on the historical and thematic overview provided throughout the course and your own engagement with secondary and primary sources, the presentation needs to engage critically with one of the course themes as applied to a Singaporean context. The presentation needs to include a clear introduction, main argument, and conclusion and a list of references needs to be provided at the end. The presentation should last about 30 mins (the exact length will depend on class size), followed by a short Q&A session (5 mins.). Apart from critical reading of sources and presentation of an original historical argument, the presentation should also demonstrate teamwork skills.

Assessment will be based on the following components:

- 6) Organization (20%)
- 7) Analysis (30%)
- 8) Use of sources (30%)
- 9) Teamwork (10%)
- 10) Presentation Format (10%)

Assessment Component 6 – Research Paper 30%

You need to submit a 2500-word essay at the end of the course in which you demonstrate your ability to formulate an original historical argument based on research. You can work on a topic of your interest, but you should include at least one primary source for the essay. You should bring a basic outline of the paper, including the primary source, during week 8. We will do an in-class discussion based on the primary source and a peer review exercise of the paper outline.

The following will be taken into account when grading:

Analysis and argument (30%)

- Critical analysis
- Formulation of a clear argument

Use of Sources (30%)

- The use of relevant readings
- The recognition, where appropriate, of different perspectives
- The use of a primary source/primary sources (non-history majors: please let me know if you need more help with this or if you are not sure what constitutes a primary source)

Organization (20%)

- The relevance of the answer to the question set
- A clear introduction; a clear conclusion

Writing/Grammar (10%)

- Grammar, style, and presentation, including the accurate acknowledgement of sources

Reference Style (10%)

- Please submit your paper double-spaced.
- For references, please use the Chicago Style (footnotes, not author-date style).

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