This course examines the ongoing social, economic, and political transformation of greater China through an anthropological lens. More specifically, we will read, watch, think about, analyze, discuss and write about a selection of recent ethnographies, research essays, and selected films that take as their subject ‘China’. Our purpose is to look with intent at how the revolutionary transformation of everyday life in China has affected the lived experiences of actually existing people. How do people at the level of everyday life grapple with, maneuver around, interact with, contest, support, accede to, or ignore larger and more powerful structural forces? How do they go about engaging in what the theorist Michel De Certeau referred to as the “art of getting by”?

Course Materials

BOOKS (You should purchase copies of #1, #2, and #4):


FILMS (shown in class):

- Jia Zhanhke, “Pickpocket” (*Xiao Wu*), 1997.
- Feng Xiaogang, “Big Shot’s Funeral” (*Da War*), 2002.
• Li Yu, “Lost in Beijing” (Pingguo), 2007.

ARTICLES (available on Blackboard):

• Chen, Nancy. “Healing Sects and Anti-Cult Campaigns.” *China Quarterly* 174 (June 2003), 505-521.
• Tomba, Luigi. “Of Quality, Harmony and Community: Civilization and the Middle Class in China.” *Positions* 17:3 (2009), 592-616.

EVALUATION

A. Participation (25%)

This class will be run as a seminar. This means that everyone should participate in conversations and discussions. You do not need to be a speaker of Chinese, or a Chinese studies major, to take part; indeed, quite often people without much background on a subject offer fresh and different perspectives on issues. All I ask is that you complete assigned readings before class, demonstrate an interest, and show a willingness to offer questions and comments. As you read, take careful notes, especially questions you have about specific claims, terminology, concepts, theoretical perspectives, and historical points. Our discussions will focus on these points, not simply on our own opinions.

I will not evaluate your participation quantitatively. In other words, speaking a lot does not equal a full mark. Instead, I will evaluate this using the following scale:
A: Exceptional contributions showing critical analysis of readings; insightful questions; close attention to other perspectives; engagement with the views of others.

B: Useful contributions, particularly questions that further group discussions; acceptable attention to the views of others; demonstrated understanding of key points of books and other readings.

C: Minimal contributions that do not demonstrate completion of readings and/or adequate critical engagement with these readings; polite listening to other comments.

D: Listening, even politely and attentively, without contributing; consistent lack of engagement with texts

Blackboard Postings (40%): You will write a 500-750 word response to the assigned readings for ten class sessions. Each response should combine your reaction to the claims made, your analysis of these claims, questions you have about these claims, and finally what in your view are some implications that might follow from these claims. You should not summarize the readings. These responses are for the following weeks:

1/19, 2/2, 2/9, 2/16, 2/23, 3/1, 2/8, 3/22, 3/29, 4/19

B. Final Paper (35%)

Your final project will be a 10-12 page paper on a topic of your choice. The only requirements are:

1. Your analysis is ethnographic / anthropological;
2. You draw on at least five ethnographic sources beyond course readings;
3. You link your paper with your ‘on the ground experiences’ in China over our Spring Break.

The key point is to have a clear, concise, and specific question. Over the course of the semester we will discuss the realities of class (peasants, workers, migrants, middle class, new rich, professionals, and intellectuals), gender & sexuality, and ethnicity in contemporary China. Within each and between these a range of issues, topics, and questions exist to explore. This paper will be due on the official exam date. However, before this you will need to submit a beginning question and a bibliography, and also make a short presentation in class.

- Paper Question: March 24th
- Working Bibliography: April 19th
- Class Presentation: April 26th & 27th
- Paper: Official Exam Date
Schedule

PART I: Agency, Labor & Mobility


Week II (January 19th & 21st): Labor in a Post-Socialist Society (Lee Ching Kwan, Against the Law: Labor Protests in China’s Rustbelt and Sunbelt, selections)

Week III (January 26th & 28th): FILMS: Black Snow, Shower

PART II: Consumption & Individualism


Week V (February 9th & 11th): State Heteronomy vs. Market Heteronomy, or, How to Tell Tales of Importance in an Authoritarian, Market-Dominated State (McGrath, Post-Socialist Modernity, Chapters 1 & 4; FILMs: Curiosity Killed the Cat, Spring Subway, Cell Phone [excerpts])

Week VI (February 16th & 18th): The Moral Ambiguities of Consumer Capitalism (McGrath, Post-Socialist Modernity, Chapters 5-6; FILM: Xiao Wu [excerpts], Big Shot’s Funeral)


PART III: Transformed Landscapes, or, the Fascination with Faux

Week VIII (March 1st & 3rd): The Fascination with Faux (Bianca Bosker, Original Copies, Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-66; Robert Weller, “New Natures”)

Week IX (March 8th & 10th): Mimicry or Piracy? Copy Culture Unbound (Bianca Bosker, Original Copies, Chapters 4-5 and Conclusion, pp. 67-132)
Week X (March 11th-19th): Beijing

PART IV: Being Different: Ethnicity & Otherness

Week XI (March 22nd & 24th): Tourism, Heritage & Authenticity (Oakes, “Ethnic Tourism in Rural Guizhou”; Emily Yeh, Taming Tibet, Introduction & Part I, pp. 1-91)

Week XII (March 29th & 31st): The ‘Gift of Development’ (Emily Yeh, Taming Tibet, Parts II & III, pp. 95-271)

April 5th & 7th: No class (your belated spring break)

Week XIII (April 12th – 14th): When Nothing is Sacred (FILM: Lost in Beijing)

Week XIV (April 19th & 21st): Tourism, Heritage, and Rights (Shepherd, Faith in Heritage)

Week XV (April 26 & 27): Research Presentations & Workshop