

Anthropology 3705
Contemporary Chinese Culture & Society
The George Washington University
Spring 2016

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11.10 am -12.25 pm
Monroe Hall, Room 250

Professor Robert Shepherd
Department of Anthropology & ESIA
1957 E St. NW, # 601-A
rshepherd@gwu.edu

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):

1. Bosker, Bianca. *Original Copies: Architectural Mimicry in Contemporary China*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-0824836061
2. McGrath, Jason. *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age*. Stanford University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0804773638
3. Shepherd, Robert. *Faith in Heritage: Displacement, Development and Religious Tourism in Contemporary China*. Left Coast Press, 2013 [available on Blackboard, gratis].
4. Yeh, Emily. *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development*. Cornell University Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-0801478321

FILMS (shown in class):

- Xie Fei, "Black Snow" (*Ben Ming Nian*), 1990.
- Wen Jiang, "A Beijing Man in New York" (*Beijing Ren Zai Niu Yue*), 1994.
- Yang Zhang, "Shower" (*Xizao*), 1999.
- Jia Zhangke, "The World" (*Shi Jie*), 2001.
- Jia Zhanhke, "Pickpocket" (*Xiao Wu*), 1997.
- Feng Xiaogang, "Big Shot's Funeral" (*Da War*), 2002.
- Feng Xiaogang, "Cellphone" (*Shouji*), 2004.

- Li Yu, "Lost in Beijing" (*Pingguo*), 2007.

ARTICLES (available on Blackboard):

- Barme, Geramie. "To Screw Foreigners is Patriotic: China's Avant-Garde Nationalist." *The China Journal* 34 (July, 1995), pp. 209-234.
- -----. "Soft Porn, Packaged Dissent, and Nationalism: Notes on Chinese Culture in the 1990s." *Current History* 93 (September 1994), 270-275.
- Chan, Kam Wing & Li Zhang, "The Hukou System and Rural-Urban Migration in China: Processes and Changes". *China Quarterly* 160 (December 1999), 818-856.
- Chen, Nancy. "Healing Sects and Anti-Cult Campaigns." *China Quarterly* 174 (June 2003), 505-521.
- Damm, Jens. "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society." *Critical Asian Studies* 39:2 (2007), 273-294.
- Kipnis, Andrew. "Suzhi: A Keyword Approach." *China Quarterly* 2006, 295-313.
- Nyíri, Pal. *Scenic Spots: Chinese Tourism, the State, and Cultural Authenticity*. Seattle: University of Washington, 2006, Chapters 1 & 2.
- Potter, Pitman. "Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China." *The China Quarterly* 174 (June 2003).
- Shepherd, Robert. "Age of the Law's End: Falun Gong and the Cultivation of Modernity in Post-Maoist China" *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8:4 (December 2005).
- Tomba, Luigi. "Of Quality, Harmony and Community: Civilization and the Middle Class in China." *Positions* 17:3 (2009), 592-616.
- Weller, Robert Weller. "New Natures" in *Discovering Nature: Globalization and Environmental Culture in China and Taiwan*. Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 43-63.
- Yang Guobin. "The Internet and Civil Society in China: A Preliminary Assessment." *Journal of Contemporary China* (2003), 12(36), 453-475.

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 I (January 12th & 14th): **Work, Property & Mobility in New China** (Kam & Zhang Li, “The *Hukou* System and Rural-Urban Migration in China”; Luigi Tomba, “Of Quality, Harmony and Community: Civilization and the Middle Class in China”; Andrew Kipnis, “*Suzhi*: A Keyword Approach”).

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 IV (February 2nd & 4th): **State Censorship and Political Realities, or, Why Can't I Use Facebook in China?** (Barme, “To Screw Foreigners is Patriotic: China's Avant-Garde Nationalist”; Jens Damm, “The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society”; Lydia Liu, “Beijing Sojourners in New York: Post-Socialism and the Question of Ideology in Global Media Culture.” *Positions* 7:3 (1999): 793-797; FILM: “A Beijing Man in New York”, Episode 1); *Shower*, conclusion.

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*)

Week VII (February 23rd & 25th): **A Matter of Faith: Religion in Contemporary China** (Nancy Chen, “Healing Sects and Anti-Cult Campaigns”; Pittman Potter, “Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China”; RJ Shepherd, “Age of the Law's End: Falun Gong and the Cultivation of Modernity in Post-Maoist China”)

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**