Contemporary Chinese Culture and Society  
(HSEA W3850) 

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Class meets T Th 4:10-5:25 in 805 Altschul Hall (Barnard)

Introduction

This course provides a survey of social change in reform-era China (1978-present). Broad in scope, the course will examine the main areas of contemporary Chinese life: economy, politics, society, culture, and the environment. It will show how, under conditions not of their own choice, the Chinese people are both shapers of their own fate and constrained in their struggles for a better life and more just and equitable society. The analysis will help students to understand better the lived experiences of the Chinese people, as well as the causes and consequences of social inequality, social conflicts, and social change.

Our analytic approach is primarily sociological, aimed at the interpretive understanding of the course and consequences of social action. We try to see how social structures and institutions influence personal lives and how individual and collective forms of action may in turn transform institutions and structures.

Our goal is to achieve a preliminary understanding of the contemporary Chinese experience in the context of world-historical change. Such an introduction may

1) deepen our understanding of the diversity of human experience;
2) increase our knowledge of contemporary world culture;
3) expand our sociological vision and personal horizon;
4) provide a knowledge base for analyzing current national and world affairs, in which China often plays an important role; and
5) offer useful tools for critical social analysis.

Requirements

1. Participation (10%). Class attendance is required. Participation in class discussions is essential.

2. Group project (10%): Each student will participate in ONE group project.

3. Two 6-page analytic essays (25% each; double space, Times New Roman, Font 12). Topic to be announced.

4. Final exam (30%)
Grading

A+ = 98 or above  B+ = 86-89  C+ = 76-79  D = 60-64
A = 94-97  B = 83-85  C = 70-75  F = Below 60
A- = 90-93  B- = 80-82  C- = 65-69

Readings

Reading assignments consist of journal articles and book chapters and four books. Except for those marked as “optional,” all readings listed below are required. The books are available in Labyrinth Books and are as follows:


Books and book chapters are on reserve in Butler Library. Unless otherwise noted, journal articles are available through the electronic journal databases of the libraries. The easiest way of accessing the databases is to search for the journal title in CLIO.

The Honor Code

Approved by the student body in 1912, the Barnard College Honor Code states:

> We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the college by refraining from every form of dishonesty in our academic life. We consider it dishonest to ask for, give, or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any papers or books not authorized by the instructor in examinations, or to present oral work or written work which is not entirely our own, unless otherwise approved by the instructor. We consider it dishonest to remove without authorization, alter, or deface library and other academic materials. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.

Please refer to the Honor Code booklet, distributed to all new students. If you do not have a copy, please pick up in the Dean of Studies office. (Source: http://www.barnard.edu/dos/honor.html).

**The Honor Code applies to all work in this course.**
Class schedule

The end of the Cultural Revolution and the launching of economic reform


The process and significance of China’s economic reform


The student movement in 1989

Sept. 19 Craig Calhoun, Neither Gods Nor Emperors (University of California Press, 1994), Part II.


The State


Inequality


Peasants


Workers


Essay 1 due in class today.

**Women**


**The emerging middle class**


**Religion and ethnicity**


**Media**


**Nov. 2** Find and read a recent news article on the Chinese internet.


Nov. 7 Election day. No class.

Popular culture


Environmental issues

Nov. 14 In-class viewing of clips of documentary film, *Before the Flood*.


*The State of China Atlas*, Part Six

Globalization, transnationalism, and Greater China


**Essay 2 due in class today.**

**Nov. 23 Thanksgiving holiday. No class.**


**Civil society and and political reform**

**Nov. 30** Lowell Dittmer, “Conclusion: China’s Reform Deepening,” in *China’s Deep Reform*, pp. 493-506.

Andrew Nathan, “China’s Constituionalist Option,” in *China’s Deep Reform*, pp. 177-190.


Tony Saich, “Negotiating the State: The Development of Social Organizations in China,” in *China’s Deep Reform*, pp. 285-301.


**Dec. 7 Course summary (last class meeting)**

**Final exam**