Course Description

It is not an exaggeration to say that Chinese people have been forced time and again to change the course of their lives by the reforms that began in the late 1970s. Along with economic prosperity the reforms have brought about dramatic structural reorganization and rapid social changes. This course will examine contemporary Chinese society and its unique development path from a sociological perspective, with particular attention to the social and cultural changes that have come about as a result of economic reforms. We will analyze how relations between the state and society and between organizations and individuals have changed, how these changes affect people's lives, social relations and value systems, and how people's different responses to structural reorganization have altered the trajectory of reforms. We will examine interactions among politics, institutions, ideology, and collective actions. By examining the case of China, students are expected to gain a solid grasp not only of contemporary China, but also of social development in general.

Required Texts


A course reading pack.

The books are available in Labyrinth Books. Please purchase the coursepack at Broadway Copy Center: 3062 Broadway (at 121 St.) Tel: 212-864-6501 (call beforehand). All reading materials are on reserve in Barnard and East Asian Libraries.
1) Attendance and class participation  (10%)

2) Weekly web memo addressing assigned readings (15%)

3) Take-home mid-term exam. Essay topics for the exam will be distributed in class two weeks prior to the due date. In the essays, you will be asked to address the assigned topics based on required readings and class discussions. Essays should be no longer than 8 pages. (20%)

4) Research paper (12-14 pages). A one-page proposal with bibliography must be submitted first. (30%)

5) In-class cumulative final exam (25%)

Class Schedule

Readings marked with an asterisk * are in the coursepack.

Section I: Introduction: Defining Contemporary China

Week 1 Jan. 18 Introduction


Fei, Xiaotong. Chapter 1 pp. 37-44

Week 2 Jan. 25 Social Life under Socialism

Documentary Film: Mao Years (2 hours) (Screening will be scheduled on Jan. 24. Time: TBA)

Section II: Structural Changes and Reorganization

Week 3


Week 4 Feb. 8 From "Iron Rice Bowl" to "China Rice Bowl"


See Documentary Film: China in the Red (2 hours) (Screening will be scheduled on Feb. 7; time: TBA)

Feb. 10 From Public to Private Ownership


Week 5 Feb. 15 From Countryside to Cities (I) Zhang, Li. 2001. Chapter 1-3 in Strangers in the City. Feb. 17 From Countryside to Cities (II)
Week 6 Feb. 22 From Backdoor to Front Door? Wank, David. 1999. Chapter 3-6 in *Commodifying Communism*

Feb. 24 From Comradeship to Personal Network


One-page paper proposal due Take-home mid-term essay questions distributed

Section III: Social Conflicts and Unrest


Mid-term essay due

Spring Break

Mar. 24 Women's Unemployment and Reemployment


Week 10 Mar. 29 Falun Gong: An Ideological Void?


Mar. 31 Public Space: Interaction, Negotiation and Reconstruction


Week 11 April 5 Who Is Richer and Who Is Poorer: Changing Patterns of Inequality


April 7 Screening: *Blind Shaft* (90 minutes)

Week 13 April 19 Shopping Frenzy: the Formation of Consumer Culture


April 21 Ideological Shift: Nationalism


Week 14 April 26 Modernity Discourse


April 28 Summary

Research paper due