HIST 206.301/URBS260.301/EALC 141.541
Cities in Chinese History
A Historical Approach to Chinese Urbanism
Fall 2005

Wednesdays 2-4:30 PM, Will 2

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What can cities tell us about China? China has always been considered a prime example of agricultural civilization. Focus on the dominant majority of the population, the rural peasants, often obscures the role cities played in China’s historical development. This seminar will challenge the conventional image of China and ask: when China’s past two millennia is filtered through the lens of cities, what is the history that emerges?

We will move beyond the conventional dynasty model, one that evolves around the interplay between the emperor, mandarins, and peasants, to a new temporal scheme based on urban developments. From this urban perspective, the seminar presents Chinese history as a series of urban revolutions that marked critical moments of Chinese society, each accompanied with primary accounts (novels, essays, paintings, or films) that shaped contemporary experiences and perceptions of urban space. This arrangement will allow us to address two main issues of this seminar: How did various forces (economic, political, or international) affect the definitions and identities of Chinese cities? How did these changes in turn re-shape the living experiences and identities of the people who lived in urban areas?

Topics include: the city-state system in ancient China; the creation and evolution of imperial capitals; the medieval urban revolution and the subsequent collapse of classic city plans; the development of urban public sphere/public space in late imperial China; the rise of commercial power in urban politics; the negotiation of urban class and gender relations via cultural consumption; the role of cities in the building of a modern Chinese nation state; the anti-city experiment under the communist regime; urban citizenship in the reform era; as well as the expanding urbanization and shifting urbanism of Greater China as reflected in cinematic representations of Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taipei.
## Course Outline:

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## Textbooks

(textbooks are available for purchase at Penn Book Store, 3601 Walnut St. and on reserve at Van Pelt Library, Rosengarten Reserve room)

6. Supplementary readings will be available on course website ([https://courseweb.library.upenn.edu](https://courseweb.library.upenn.edu)).
Assignments and Grading Policy:

1. Attendance and Participation (10%):
   Any absence should be reported before class and be made up with an extra discussion paper. Your class performance will be evaluated by how you contribute to class discussion.

2. Discussion Leader (20 %):
   Every student has to lead class discussion twice during the semester, one before week 7 and one after. A sign up sheet will be distributed during the first class meeting. Discussion leaders should post a discussion sheet (1-2 pages) the day before class (no later than Tue 6PM) on Blackboard listing all major issues in this week’s readings with relevant page numbers specified. This sheet should briefly explain the reasons why they deserve our attention and how they relate to what we have already discussed in previous meetings. Discussion leader will also post a report (due the following Friday 6PM) on Blackboard summarizing class discussion and how the above issues are addressed in class.

3. Short Assignments (1-3 pages) (30%):
   Short assignments should respond to questions listed in the syllabus marked by *Short Assignment*. This assignment is to prepare you for class discussion and will be due the day before class meeting (Tue. 10 PM) to be posted on blackboard. You should submit six out of the seven assignments, which will be simply graded as check [meaning that you have demonstrated sound understanding of the readings], check plus [meaning that you are able to digest the readings with original viewpoints], or check minus [meaning that you fail to understand the readings].

4. Final Project (40%):
   This includes a 10-15 page final paper (30%) and an in-class presentation (10%), both due on the day of the final class (Dec 7).
   For your final paper, you will pick one of the following topics:
   - A critical review essay. Based on the course materials, this essay should choose one of main themes covered in the seminar and trace its development through time (for example, urban autonomy, urban experiences, imperial capitals, urbanizations, urban regime…etc)
   - Imagine you are asked by a museum or a popular magazine to contribute an illustrated essay on Chinese cities. Use the sources introduced in the class to construct a proposal for a museum exhibition or an article to be published for public circulation.
   - Design your own topic. To be approved by the instructor in advance.

5. No late submission will be accepted. All the course requirements listed above must be fulfilled in order to pass the course. Failure in any segment will result in failure of the whole course. Exceptions will only be made for documented emergencies.

6. Academic Integrity: please read the university guidelines carefully [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html). Any violation will result in a failing grade and subject to disciplinary actions.
Weekly Schedule

WEEK I (Sep 7): Introduction: Cities and Empire---How does Space Matter?

READINGS:

WEEK II (Sep 14): Framing the Issues: What is the Chinese Urbanism? Universalism vs. Particularism

READINGS:

SHORT ASSIGNMENTS:
- How did these authors define the concept of “Chinese cities”? With what evidence? Summarize the main argument in each article and post your response (1-3 pages) on Blackboard by Tuesday 10 PM.

WEEK III (Sep 21): From City States to Empire: The First Urban Revolution

How was the first Chinese imperial capital created? What are the practical and symbolic functions of capital cities? How should we characterize the urban experience in ancient China?

READINGS:
- Michael Loewe, Everyday Life in Early Imperial China, 128-162.

WEEK IV (Sep 28): The Medieval Urban Revolution

READINGS:
- Kiang Chye Heng, Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats: The Development of Cityscapes in Medieval China.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT:
- What changes does the medieval urban revolution entail? Make a comparison list
between the Tang and Song cities and identify the driving forces behind this transformation.

WEEK V (Oct 5): Urban Life before and after the Medieval Urban Revolution

READINGS:

- “The Tale of Li Wa”
  This is a love story that took place in an urban pleasure quarter. Look at the spatial components in the narrative---how is the plot affected by the particular urban design?

- http://www.qingmingtu.com/htm/qingming03.htm


- Steven West, “A Dream of the Eastern Capital,” in *Hawaii Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture*
  What is the urban experience presented in this work compared with what we have read before?


SHORT ASSIGNMENT:

- How to read the traditional cityscape painting like *Qingming shanghe tu*? Translate the city landscape painting into a textual narrative.

WEEK VI (Oct 12): The City System in Late Imperial China: The Skinner Thesis

READINGS:


SHORT ASSIGNMENT:

- Summarize Skinner’s model and discuss its pros and cons: what kind of problems does it solve and what does it overlook?
WEEK VII (Oct 19): Fashion and Status: Urban Consumption and Social Distinction

READINGS:
- *The Plum in the Golden Vase: Jinpingmei*
  Look for the spatial components in the story. Where and how did men and women spend their days and money? How are the urban experiences in this novel different from before?
- Tim Brook, “Fashion,” in *Confusions of Pleasure*.
- [Recommended] Craig Clunas, Ideas and Anxiety about Things.

WEEK VIII (Oct 25): Urban Autonomy: Merchant Power in the City of Hankow

READINGS:

SHORT ASSIGNMENT:
- How does the author utilize the case of Hankow to challenge Weber’s thesis?

WEEK IX (Nov 2): City, Nation, and Modernity

READINGS:

SHORT ASSIGNMENT:
- What issues are addressed by the articles in this collection? Are they successful in answering the issues raised in the introductory chapter by Esherick? Try to draft a conclusion for this edited volume.

WEEK X (Nov 9): Shanghai Modern

READINGS:
- Eileen Chang, Translated by Andrew F. Jones, *Written on Water*.
  What is different in the urban experiences of these “petty urbanites?” [Compared with Jinpingmei or Li Wa’s story]
WEEK XI (Nov 16): Cities under the Communist Regime
What are the features of the Chinese communist urban regime? To what end was it conceived? What functions and roles were assigned to cities? How does it alter the preceding urbanization process?

READINGS:
- Feng Jicai, “I Refuse to Admit I Was a Sacrificial Object,” in Ten Years of Madness.

SHORT ASSIGNMENT:
- Why did the communist urban regime devolve into an open urban guerilla warfare as seen in the Cultural Revolution?

WEEK XII (Nov 23): Urban Autonomy in Late-Socialist China

READINGS:
- Dutton, Street life China, “The Architecture of Life.”
- [Recommended] Hutong, Alleyways of Change in Contemporary Beijing (documentary).

***Final project proposal due in class***

WEEK XIII (Nov 30): A Tale of Three Cities: Urban space in Greater China

READINGS:
- Wong Kar-Wai’s, Chungking Express. (Hongkong) [Call No. VHS PN1997 .C486 1996].
- Lou Ye, Suzhou River (Shanghai).
- Tsai Ming-liang, Vive l'Amour (Taipei) [Call No. DVD PN1995.9.S45 A37 1998].

WEEK XIV (Dec 7): Class Presentation