A4575 City and Countryside in China

Fall 2016

W 11:00 am-1:00 pm, 200 Buell N

Instructor: Ou Ning (no2223@columbia.edu)

Course Description:

The aim of this course is to explain how China grasped the land and labor from the countryside for the city expansion, raised the spatial production in urban area, brought the economic to a new scale meanwhile produced a lot of social problems. Special attention will be paid to the critical thinking and practices in the New Rural Reconstruction Movement led by some Chinese intellectuals. Finally we will examine how “ruralism” worked as the opposition to urbanism.

When China joined the WTO in 2001, it had become part of the global economy. The Chinese government embraced the globalization warmly, and drove the process of urbanization more radically forward. The urbanization was a kind of redistribution of social resources, including land, property amongst others; it was in some sense more radical than a revolution. The urbanism policy offered a lot of opportunities for the starchitects from all over the world to design iconic buildings but also produced social problems like the slums or urban villages in the cities, the depopulation in the rural area, the environmental crisis, the food risk, and especially the political conflicts caused by the lack of social justice.

Even the Chinese government launched the “Building New Countryside” policy later, but all the official practices in the rural area were still running in the urbanism way, a lot of funding was invested only to transform the villages into towns or small cities. In contrast, some Chinese intellectuals started the New Rural Reconstruction Movement which focus on the “Three Rural Problems”(rural people, rural society and the rural agriculture), to deal with the rural situation on the background of globalization, working more on social and environmental justice, activating the local economic and cultural life in villages but not gentrified, making them more like their original looks but not the urban style. The “ruralism” behind these unofficial practices quoted a lot of thinking resources and historical experiences from all over the world, criticized the excessive urbanization
in China, tried to build a new model for rural development, was then becoming the driven force of an anti-urbanization movement in the country.

When looking into the mutation in urban and rural China, we will ask more questions in this course: Why were the Chinese peasants always the victims? How to empower or animate the grass root people? As a professional, how architect or urban designer can promote the social change? Is a practical utopia possible in the reality?

Films and Readings:

Some films will be on reserve at the Butler library. In case you have to miss the film screening, make sure that you watch the film before class on Wednesday.

Required and suggested readings can be accessed through the course website as well as through library reserves. Please finish the reading assignments before coming to class.

Course Requirement and Grading:

- Attendance and class participation (10%)
- 6 weekly postings (20%). Topics are suggested each week. Students are also welcome to work on their own topics after consulting with the instructor.
- Midterm paper (20%): 1500-2000 words, due October 26 (Wed), 12 noon.
- Term paper (35%): 3000-4000 words, topics must be discussed with the instructor by November 16 (Wed).

Online Platforms:

All assignments are submitted online through Canvas.

Course Schedule

Week 1
September 7 (Wed)

Introduction: From City to Countryside

Required Readings:

Suggested Further Readings:
* Xiaotong Fei(Hsiao-Tung Fei), From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society, University of California Press, 1992
* Ray Huang, Broadening The Horizons of Chinese History: Discourses, Syntheses, and Comparisons, Routledge, 1999

Recommended Films:
* Big Fish & Begonia (Liang Xuan and Zhang Cun, 2016, animated epic fantasy film, 90 mins)
* Let the Bullets Fly (Jiang Wen, 2010, action comedy film, 132 mins)

Weekly Assignment 1 (due September 13, Tue, 12 noon): Write 3 paragraphs to describe what you know about China or Peter Hessler (in case you’ve read his books before). Submit through Canvas.

Week 2:

September 14 (Wed)
The Purpose-built Cities: Radical Urbanism before and after the Culture Revolution

- Required Readings:

  Suggested Further Readings:
  * Jingting Fan and Ben Zou, Industrialization from Scratch: The Persistent Effects of China’s Third Front Movement, August 30, 2015.
    econ.msu.edu/seminars/docs/TF_Draft_20150830.pdf
  * Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas and Sze Tsung Leong, Great Leap Forward/Harvard Design School Project on the City, Taschen, 2002.

  Recommended Films:
  * Shanghai Dreams (Wang Xiaoshuai, 2005, color feature film, 115 mins)
    Library reserve: https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/7755005
  * 24 City (Jia Zhangke, 2008, color docudrama, 107 mins)
    Library reserve: https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/7468327

  Weekly Assignment 2 (due September 20, Tue, 12 noon): Find 1-3 purpose-built cities or shrinking cities in your country and give a paragraph description to each. Submit through Canvas.

Week 3:

September 21 (Wed)

Social Flux and Urban Villages
Required Readings:


Screening:

* *San Yuan Li* (Ou Ning and Cao Fei, 2003, black+white documentary, 40 mins)

Library reserve: https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/7002584

Suggested Further Readings:


Recommended Films:

* *Last Train Home* (Lixin Fan, 2009, documentary, 85 mins)

Library reserve: https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/8326487
**Weekly Assignment 3 (due September 27, Tue, 12 noon):** Did you visit any slum or urban village in any country? Write 3 paragraphs about your observation. Submit through Canvas.

**Week 4**

**September 28 (Wed)**

**The Event-driven Cities - Architectural Practices in an Eyeball Era**

*Required Readings:*


*Suggested Further Readings:*


* Ou Ning (ed.), *Odyssey: Architecture and Literature*, publication of 2009 Shenzhen and Hong Kong Bi-city Biennale or Urbanism \ Architecture, China Youth Press, Beijing, 2009.


https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2014/oct/23/-sp-chinas-strangest-buildings-from-pairs-of-pants-to-ping-pong-bats (Links to an external site.)

Weekly Assignment 4 (due October 4, Tue, 12 noon): Find 2-3 post-Olympic or post-EXPO cites and write 3 paragraphs about your observation for each. Submit through Canvas.

**Week 5**

**October 5 (Wed)**

**The Demolition and Grass Root Politics**
Required Readings:


Suggested Further Readings:

* Mike Davis, Planet of Slums, Verso, 2007


* Asef Bayat, Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East Stanford University Press, 2010

* William Foote Whyte, Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of An Italian Slum, University of Chicago Press, 1943

Screening:

* Meishi Street (Ou Ning, 2005, color documentary, 85 mins)

Library reserve: https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/7002586
**Recommended Films:**

*Tai Shi Village*(Ai Xiaoming, 2006, documentary, 114 mins)

*Three Days in Wukan*(Ai Xiaoming, 2012, documentary, 100 mins)

Library reserve: https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/10277386

**Weekly Assignment 5 (due October 11, Tue, 12 noon):** Write 1 page review about the film Meishi Street. Submit through Canvas.

**Week 6**

**October 12 (Wed)**

**City Regeneration and Historical Preservation**

**Required Readings:**


**Suggested Further Readings:**


Weekly Assignment 6 (due October 18, Tue, 12 noon): Write 1 page to express your understanding about the term “Gentrification”. Submit through Canvas.

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**Week 7**

**October 19 (Wed)**

**The Crisis of Radical Urbanism**

- **Required Readings:**
  


- **Recommended Films:**
  
  * *Beijing Besieged by Waste* (Wang Jiuliang, 2011, documentary, 72 mins)

  Library reserve: [https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/10078035](https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/10078035)

Weekly Assignment 7 (due October 25, Tue, 12 noon): Write 1 page on this topic: How the Crisis Can Become an Opportunity? Submit through Canvas.

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**Week 8**

**October 26 (Wed)**

**The Depopulated Countryside and the Collapsed Rural Society**
Required Readings:

Suggested Further Readings:
Xiaotong Fei, From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society, University of California Press, 1992

Weekly Assignment 8 (due November 1, Tue, 12 noon): Write 1 page on this topic: How can the villages be rescued? Submit through Canvas.

Week 9
November 2 (Wed)
The New Rural Reconstruction Movement

Required Reading:

Suggested Further Readings:
* International Institute of Rural Reconstruction records, 1914 -1999
Weekly Assignment 9 (due November 8, Tue, 12 noon): Please analyze the political spectrum of the Chinese intellectuals in the NRRM and tell the reason. Submit through Canvas.

Week 10
November 9 (Wed)
The Bishan Project: A Case Study

Required Readings:


* Ou Ning, Bishan Commune: How to Start Your Own Utopia, OVO Press and Antipyrine, Aarhus, 2015. (In Chinese, Danish and English)

Read Mai Corlin’s introduction here:
https://ovopress.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/introduction.pdf (Links to an external site.)
The publication can be purchased from OVO press’ webshop:
http://ovopress.tictail.com/product/ou-ning-bishan-commune (Links to an external site.)

Screening:

* Down to the Countryside (Leah Thompson and Sun Yunfan, 2012-2017, Color Documentary, short version, 30 mins)

See the video here in case you missed in the class:
http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/asia-china-beijing-bishan-countryside-culture-art-economy-environment (Links to an external site.)
Weekly Assignment 10 (due November 15, Tue, 12 noon): Write a review on the Bishan Project. Submit through Canvas.

- Week 11

November 16 (Wed)

Agritopia: From The Well Field to the Whole Earth

Required Readings:


Suggested Further Readings:

* 12 Southerners, I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1930.


* Helen and Scott Nearing, The Good Life: Helen and Scott Nearing’s Sixty Years of Self-Sufficient Living, Schocken Books, 1970


Weekly Assignment 11 (due November 22, Tue, 12 noon): Find 5 utopian architecture project in the history and write a review for each. Submit through Canvas.
Week 12

November 23 (Wed)

The Contemporary Architectural Practices in Rural China

Required Readings:

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/18/arts/design/architects-see-potential-in-chinas-countryside.html?_r=0 (Links to an external site.)

Suggested Further Readings:

Weekly Assignment 12 (due November 29, Tue, 12 noon): Give a proposal if the villagers need you to build a small tea pavilion near a river in the mountain (please include draft drawings and a description. Submit through Canvas.

Week 13

November 30 (Wed)

Conclusion: Ruralism versus Urbanism
Required Readings: