Fall 2009

Agrarian Societies
Culture, Power, History, and Development

Anthropology 541a
Forestry and Environmental Studies 80054a
History 965a
Political Science 779a

Instructors:
Peter C. Perdue, History
James C. Scott, Political Science
K. Sivaramakrishnan, Anthropology

Meetings: Thursdays, 1:30-3:10 pm
10 Sachem Street
Room 105

Discussions: Thursdays, 3:30-5:20 pm
10 Sachem Street
Rooms 212 and 307
This seminar presents a multi-disciplinary perspective on the modern transformation of the countryside of the world. The rise of a capitalist mode of production as the engine of a world economy, the emergence of a contentious international polity of nation-states, and the propagation of rationalizing religions and standardizing education are three distinct yet intersecting processes in the modern transformation of the world since the 1500s. These processes have not been inevitable, or irreversible, or complete. However, they have been compelling, in so far as they have come to frame both our acceptance of and resistance to the modern order in which we find ourselves.

"Peasant studies" is a rubric for the loosely-bound, interdisciplinary exploration of the initial modernization of the European countryside and the subsequent engagement and ongoing incorporation of the countryside of Asia, Africa, and the Americas into this modern order. At its most precocious, it tries to comprehend the intrusive thrusts of nation-state formation, capitalist production, and the rationalization of belief into the most distant agrarian regions of the world. At its most instructive, it insists that people everywhere have confronted those forces with their particular histories and distinctive, local configurations of environment, society, and culture. Everywhere, the encounters of old and new ways of viewing the world and organizing activities have been fitful and frightful, always metamorphic, but never uniform. Animating peasant studies has been the concern to demonstrate the varied ways in which peasants have shared in the making of the modern world that has in turn transformed their lives.

We intend this to be an introductory seminar. That is, we assume you may be ignorant of much of the basic literature. We also assume that you work hard and learn fast. Although the varying backgrounds of students and faculty require us to be somewhat eclectic, we hope that the seminar will prove foundational in an interdisciplinary sense for subsequent work on agrarian issues in any discipline. We encourage you, in your writing and discussion, to make vigorous efforts to be understood across disciplinary boundaries.

Seminar meetings combine lectures and discussions. We expect regular attendance; please notify us in advance if you are unable to come to a session. We regard participation in discussions to be a gauge of students' completion and comprehension of the assigned readings. We will evaluate your performance in the seminar on the basis of this participation and on the quality and timeliness of the writing assignments.

Each student will choose readings from six meetings and write short responses of roughly 500 words evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the reading in the light of lectures and discussions. At least three of the short response papers should be submitted before October 31.

Each student will lead the discussion in class twice during the semester. This will involve presenting the reading and posing a couple of questions to initiate the discussion. The questions should be posted to the Classes V2 Server the night before the class discussion. In class, the designated discussion leaders should each expect to speak for 10-12 minutes.

Each student will write a final research paper of no more than 5,000 words. An outline for the essay should be discussed with one of the course instructors before the eighth seminar meeting on October 22nd. The final paper will be due at 5 pm on December 17th – a paper version in the Agrarian Studies office (room 204 at 204 Prospect Street) and electronically on the Classes V2 server.

Grades will be determined as follows: 5% for each short response; 10% for each discussion leadership; 50% for the final essay.

All books are available for purchase at Labyrinth Bookstore and are also on reserve in the Bass Library. All other materials - book chapters, articles, documents - will be available as electronic reserves through the Bass Library and/or on the Resources section of the class site on Classes V2 Server.
September 3  

**Week One**

**Introduction to the Course**

Introduction of instructors; student introductions.  
Brief lecture by James C. Scott

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September 10  

**Week Two**

Lecture by Peter C. Perdue

**The Origins of Agrarian Life in East Asia:**
*Settled Agriculture and Pastoralism [ca 1200 – 100 BCE]*

**Readings:**


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September 17  

**Week Three**

Lecture by James C. Scott

**Crops and States:**
*The Agriculture of Appropriation and Escape*

**Readings:**


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September 24  

**Week Four**

Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

**Colonialism, Capitalism, and Agrarian Change in South Asia**

**Reading:**

October 1  
**Week Five**  
Lecture by Peter C. Perdue

**The Move to the South:**
Rice Paddies and Swidden Production [8th to 12th century CE]

**Readings:**


October 8  
**Week Six**  
Lecture by James C. Scott

**Land Tenure and Subsistence Rights**

**Readings:**


October 15  
**Week Seven**  
Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

**Rural Development**

**Reading:**

October 22  
**Week Eight**  
Lecture by Peter C. Perdue

**Famine**

**Readings:**


October 29

**Week Nine**

Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

**Commodities and Industrial Agriculture in the Twentieth Century**

**Reading:** Catherine Zeigler. 2007. *Favored Flowers: Culture and Economy in a Global System.* Durham: Duke University Press. *(Labyrinth)*

November 5

**Week Ten**

Lecture by James C. Scott

**Water: Comoditization and Control, East and West**


**OR**


November 12

**Week Eleven**

Lecture by James C. Scott

**Agrarian Rebellion and Revolution**


November 19

**Week Twelve**

Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

**Ideas of Nature, Lineages for Sustainable Agriculture**

**Reading:** Michael Mayerfeld Bell. 2004. *Farming for Us All: Practical Agriculture and the Cultivation of Sustainability.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University. *(Labyrinth)*
December 3  

**Week Thirteen**  

Lecture by Peter C. Perdue

**Industrialization and Environmental Crisis [19th – 21st century]**

**Readings:**  

