

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-bounded, 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

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: Mark Elvin. 2004. *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China*, pp.9-114. New Haven: Yale University Press. ([Yale Internet Resource](#))

Thomas J. Barfield. 1989. "Introduction" in *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
(Labyrinth)

Nicola Di Cosmo. 1994. "Ancient Inner Asian Nomads: Their Economic Basis and Its Significance in Chinese History." *Journal of Asian Studies* 53 (4): 1092-112.

Joseph Fletcher. 1986. "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46(1): 11-50.

September 17

Week Three

Lecture by James C. Scott

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

Readings: James McCann. 2005. *Maize and Grace*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. ([Yale Internet Resource](#))

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg. 1993. "Potatoes and Knowledge" in *An Anthropological Critique of Development: The Growth of Ignorance*, edited by Mark Hobart. London: Routledge. **(Labyrinth)**

September 24

Week Four

Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

Colonialism, Capitalism, and Agrarian Change in South Asia

Reading: Vinay Gidwani. 2008. *Capital Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
(Labyrinth)

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: Robert B. Marks. 2006. *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China*, pp. 1-52; 163-225; 277-343. New York: Cambridge University Press. ([Yale Internet Resource](#))

Keith Schoppa. 2002. *Song Full of Tears: Nine Centuries of Chinese Life around Xiang Lake*, pp. 59-163. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (**Labyrinth**)

October 8 Week Six Lecture by James C. Scott

Land Tenure and Subsistence Rights

Readings: Douglas Hay. 1975. "Poaching and the Game Laws on Cannock Chase," in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England*, edited by Douglas Hay et al. London: Pantheon.

Peter Linebaugh. 1976. "Karl Marx, the Theft of Wood and Working Class Composition: A Contribution to the Current Debate." *Crime and Social Justice* 6:5-16.

E.P. Thompson. 1950. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." *Past and Present* 50: 76-136.

October 15 Week Seven Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

Rural Development

Reading: David Mosse. 2005. *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. London, Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press. (**Labyrinth**)

October 22 Week Eight Lecture by Peter C. Perdue

Famine

Readings: Lillian M. Li. 2007. *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s*, pp. 1-12, 221-82, 310-40, 357-86. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ralph Thaxton. 2008. *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao's Great Leap Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.118-230.

Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley. 2008. *Tears from Iron: Cultural Responses to Famine in Nineteenth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pages TBA

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: Commoditization and Control, East and West

Readings: Rohan D'Souza. 2006. *Drowned and Dammed: Colonial Capitalism and Flood Control in Eastern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. **(Labyrinth)**

OR

Mark Cioc. 2002. *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815-2000*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. **(Labyrinth)**

November 12 Week Eleven Lecture by James C. Scott

Agrarian Rebellion and Revolution

Readings: E.J. Hobsbawm. 1965. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. New York: W.W.Norton. **(Labyrinth)**

John Womack. 1968. *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. New York: Knopf. **([Yale Internet Resource](#)) (Labyrinth)**

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: Judith Shapiro. 2001. *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China, Studies in Environment and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (**Labyrinth**)

Craig J. Calhoun and Yang Guobin. 2007. "Media, Civil Society, and the Rise of a Green Public Sphere in China." *China Information*.

Yang Guobin. 2005. "Environmental Ngos and Institutional Dynamics in China." *The China Quarterly* 181:46-66.