

GSGS 2559

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT AT HOME AND ABROAD: UVA Hereford College in China

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“The only true voyage of discovery” is not “to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to hold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others...”
Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Global Engagement at Home

The broad objective of this course is to take a “voyage of discovery” of the sort championed by Proust. Of course, we will beg to differ on the significance of travel, since our spring break visit to Shanghai will almost certainly lead us toward new ways of seeing. The motivational force behind this course, nevertheless, rests on the idea that opportunities to change our perspective are always, everywhere close at hand—and the ironic correlate that, due to their proximity, such opportunities are too often missed or neglected.

At Hereford Residential College, Chinese international students comprise approximately 40% of the student body. This course seeks to integrate the cross-cultural encounters that happen between Chinese and non-Chinese students on a daily basis at HRC directly and purposefully into the curriculum. By design, the students in our class can be roughly divided into two main groups: one will have come of age in the PRC and the other in the United States or elsewhere (and some may defy easy categorization).

Aside from nationality, there will be other variabilities amongst us: regional, gender, income level, sexual orientation, aesthetic taste, world views, etc. There will be commonalities too. As a generational cohort (Generation Z) living in a so-called global era, you are moving through time and making history together. Finally, as members of a university zealously branding itself a “global” institution and as participants in a course entitled Global Engagement, you are all grappling in diverse—yet interconnected—ways with what it means to be “global.” It is my hope that these differences and commonalities will lead us to traverse manifold worlds of experience long before we ever set foot off the Grounds of UVa and make our way to Shanghai.

Viewing the Big Through the Small

The “big story” we will explore together is the massive transformation that has unfolded on a global scale over the second half of the 20th century. Recent scholarship delineates a break between a bygone world dominated by nationalist hegemony and the reigning world order in which global cities and transnational flows disrupt nation-bounded ideas and institutions. Starting in the 1950s and moving decade by decade into the present, we will ask for each 10-year period: how does the changing global political economy and its linked imaginings affect the way society is organized and life is lived in the US versus China?

Anthropologists approach the study of “big” phenomena (like nationalism and global flows) through the “small” experiences of ordinary people. In this course, our object of analysis is a collection of ethnographic snapshots constructed, on the one hand, by anthropologists who do fieldwork in the US or China, and, on the other, by us, based on our conversations with one another and our encounters in Shanghai. These localized depictions will be chronologically explored to create a processual sense of how the big story (the larger cultural and historical narrative) unfolds. The content does not cohere around a particular theme, however, we will bring to it a consistent set of anthropological questions: In each decade and locale at hand, how are individuals and groups enacting, resisting or otherwise responding to the broader cultural currents swirling about them? How do people’s actions and thoughts echo or interplay with the spirit of the times? Can they tell us something about what is collectively feared, avoided or under assault? What is being sought after, defended, resurrected or invented anew?

When pondering the present moment, we will turn the anthropological gaze upon ourselves. What are the key cultural configurations shaping who we are and who we aspire to be? To what extent are we the products of our national locations? To what extent and by what means can we broaden or transcend them? That is precisely what this course sets out to do.

Global Engagement Abroad

During our week in Shanghai we will have a chance to observe firsthand what it is like to live in a global city. We will venture into public spaces of many sorts, meet with local experts and urban inhabitants from various walks of life, and use all of our sensory receptors to take in the bustling cityscape and gather information that will help us formulate the beginnings of an answer to the question: What is the relationship between the city’s efforts and aspirations to become a global city and the lived spaces and experiences of everyday life?

Our tentative list of sites and activities includes:

- Visit Shanghai Marriage Market in People’s Park
- View the nightscape along the Bund aboard the Huang Pu River Cruise
- Experience a day in the life of a white collar worker
- Meet the *waidi* founder of an emergent fashion design start-up
- Meet the foreign founder of the Naked Castle (a British-style castle turned natural retreat)
- Enjoy the ERA Acrobat show (just for fun)
- Ascend Shanghai Tower (the global city on display from 128 stories above)
- Immerse in the propaganda posters of Mao’s China at the Propaganda Museum
- Hobnob with UVa alums in the UVa China Office
- Take a day trip to Suzhou. A major cultural center during Ming and Qing, Suzhou is now a thriving development zone infused with capital, expertise and cultural influences from Singapore and Taiwan.
- Learn about the privileges and perils of gentrification from local experts as exemplified by Xintiandi and Jingan Villa
- Hear the testimony of an 80-year-old survivor of Longhua Internment Camp (famously depicted in the novel and film *Empire of the Sun* and now an elite high school).
- Conduct interviews and observations in the Bird, Flower and Insect Market

Weekly Discussion Topics (Tentative):

1/17/18: Meeting 1: Introductions

1/24/18: Meeting 2: The 1950s

China: Idolizing the Peasant

The reading will introduce students to collectivization and its impact on local gender norms. Students will learn about the *hukou* system and how it was used to erect stark ideological and spatial distinctions between the urban and rural, in the process reversing former status hierarchies and exalting the figure of the peasant.

US: Enshrining the American Family

1950s America is associated with stability, prosperity and the enshrinement of “Leave it to Beaver” families, as reflected in the popular tv sitcoms of the era. We will explore how models of “normal” family life were part of a national project to restore “proper” gender and generational roles in the wake of the disruptions of WWII. We will consider what 1950s model obscures (all kinds of variation, instability and family dysfunction) and why nostalgia for the 1950s way of life persists today.

1/31/18: Meeting 3: The 1960s

China: The Cultural Revolution and Sent-Down Youth

We will read about the hardships of the Cultural Revolution when people from the cities were “sent down” to the countryside to be “reeducated” by the peasants. In survivors’ narratives we can observe the intertwining of bodily memory, collective memory and individual experience.

US: The Civil Rights Movement and the Student Citizen

We will discuss the social movements of the 1960s, their association with alternative lifestyles and the counterculture of sex, drugs and rock ’n roll. We will also compare the brash idealism of activist youth on 1960s American college campuses to the Chinese Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution.

2/7/18: Meeting 4: 1970s

China: Women Hold Up Half the Sky

We will explore how gender and sexuality were politicized in socialist China to promote ideals of gender equality, gender neutrality and comradeship. We will debate whether these Maoist subjectivities were empowering or stifling. We will discover how gender subjectivities under Mao were more complex than Maoist slogans and collective remembrances suggest.

US: Free to Be You and Me

We will look at the Women’s Movement of the 1970s and the life experiences of women of that era whose high rates of divorce and professional aspirations ran counter to previous generations of women.

2/14/18: Meeting 5: 1980s

China: Gaige Kaifeng (Reform and Opening)

We will discuss the profound movement away from Maoist ideals under the reforms led by Deng Xiaoping. In particular, we will examine how this new ideological and consumer-oriented context (“Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”) paved the way for new patterns of courtship as bureaucratic controls on private life began to erode.

US: Materialism Unbound

While China is becoming a population of new consumers, American society of the 1980s is favoring its own brand of deregulation. If it is “glorious to get rich” in Deng’s China, individual acquisition of wealth becomes the zeitgeist under Reagan. We will look at homages to the culture of greed/prosperity manifest in films such as “Wall Street” and Madonna’s “Material Girl.”

2/21/18 Meeting 6: 1990s

China: Consuming Revolutionary Nostalgia

We will examine how historical experiences of hardship during the Cultural Revolution are now consumed in spaces of nostalgia as China becomes a full-blown consumer economy. We will talk about restaurants where one eats like a “sent down youth” and markets where real and fake Mao buttons sell like hot cakes.

US: Growing Up Suburban

The 1990s is often popularly referred to as the “Narcissistic 90s” based on America’s seemingly bottomless appetite for McMansions, SUVs, and the “mall-ing” and suburbanization of America. We’ll explore the allure of the suburbs for white middleclass Americans and the patterns of sociality (“coexistence without contact”) contained within them.

2/28/18 Meeting 7: 2000s

China: Urbanity, Cosmopolitanism and the Migrant’s Paradox

Ultra-urbanized, global cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou have large communities of migrants. We will explore how migrant workers are integral to the booming service, manufacturing and construction industries yet arouse contempt from more established groups of urbanites who shun them as criminals and persons of low “quality” or *suzhi*.

US: The Tarnished American Dream?

We will talk about the structural issues and cultural ideals that compel people from various parts of the world to migrate to the United States for education. How do international undergraduate students assert and experience their belongingness in the United States? How are their experiences as (temporary) members of the nation positioned between and interwoven with the starkly polarized ideological divisions in American society today?

SHANGHAI MARCH 3-MARCH 10

3/14/18: Meeting 8: Wrap Up

4/18/18: Meeting 9: Final Project Presentations