

China: a Broad Overview

Spring 2010

Instructor: Linfeng Yang

Saturday 1-3pm, 6th February to 10th April

OVERVIEW

Why China is called “China”? What do people do everyday there? Why China has such a huge population? Are kids there attending similar schools as those in the States? This course gives a broad overview covering a wide range of materials introducing both China as a country and Chinese culture as a whole. Topics include: traditional and pop culture, philosophy, history, economics, politics, education system and so on. We will try to touch as many areas as possible without going into too much detail.

ASSIGNMENT

The workload is definitely low. Before each class, I will send out several terms that I expect you to be familiar before coming to the lecture. You can do any sorts of research on them as you wish but reading the Wikipedia entries about them should be sufficient. I will also assign you some reading materials in prior to each class and you can read them if you have time.

LECTURE SCHEDULE

Week 1, February 6th: Introduction: Overview of China

What is the definition of China? What is the definition of Chinese? We will talk about various concepts of China / Chinese as a country, as a territory, as a race and as a culture. We will learn some facts about China, and go over the syllabus and some issues that we will go with more details later in this course.

Week 2, February 13th: History

China has 5000 years of history and we shall try to go over it in 2 hours. We will talk about the origin of Chinese, the different types of societies in Chinese history (according to Marx: primitive, slavery, feudal, capitalist, and socialist), the key events and major transitions (reunion in Qin

Dynasty, global interaction in Tang Dynasty, Tang-Song transition, declining in mid Qing Dynasty, wars and separation since Opium Wars and foundation of the PRC), the life cycle of the dynasties, the importance of the emperors and their duties, expansion and interaction with other countries. Hope this week can give you as much background as possible to lead to other topics in the following weeks.

Week 3, February 20th: Philosophy and Religions

There were many great thinkers in Chinese history and many genes of schools of philosophy. We will talk about the period of Hundred Schools, the domination of Confucianism / Neo-Confucianism and its teaching, the concept of Daoism and its spreading, the spreading and importance of Buddhism, and the interaction between the three most important schools. We will also talk about religions in modern China.

Week 4, February 27th: Traditional Culture

China marks itself as a very “cultural” country, as we can see from the Olympic Games Opening. What does it mean by a cultural country? What elements make Chinese culture unique? We will talk about some distinctive elements in Chinese culture: festivals, food, drinks, cloth, music, architecture, painting and calligraphy (also Chinese character), Chinese ceramics (aka. China) and silk. Then we will move on to talk about traditional culture in modern China, the problems people facing when try to preserve traditional culture. We will also try to compare the situation in China to other East Asia countries like Japan and Korea. I will also try to bring some Chinese tea to the class.

Week 5, March 6th: Popular Culture

Now comes to the modern urban and country life in China. We will start by talking about the transition from traditional culture to the modern culture and the importance of some key events (Self-Strengthening Movement in late Qing Dynasty, May Fourth Movement, Culture Revolution, the economic reform in the 80s). Then we will talk about different sections of culture: songs, TV shows, novels, movies and so on. In particular, I want to talk the importance of Internet in Chinese people’s life.

----- Harvard Spring Recess -----

Week 6, March 27th: Economics and Demographics

China is now the world 3rd largest economy. What is going on behind the number? We will go over a little bit economic history (economy in ancient times, planning economy in the 60s and the economic reform in the 80s), and then talk about reason of this rapid growth, the underlying problems behind it. We will cover social problems of economic imbalance between urban and rural areas, the migrant worker issues, the social security, living conditions and so on.

Week 7, April 3rd: Government and Politics

We will talk about the structure of the government in China, the provincial system and the financial system. We will talk about freedom of speech and human rights in China, current status of NGOs, democratic reform and its possibility (potentially a live debate on this), foreign policies and emergence of civic society.

Week 8, April 10th: Education

Education is my personal interests. We will start by talking about the teaching of the Confucianism, the national examination system in ancient China and its social impact, the concept of education in ancient China. Then we will move to modern education: the national education system, the course structure, the outcomes and the problems. Personally, I have had education in China, England and the US so I will also compare these three education systems.