Overview

This course will explore China’s varied urban geographies at multiple scales of analysis. We will begin with the national scale, considering the role of cities within state development strategies, institutions of urban development, and the adequacy of various critical perspectives on state-led urbanization in China. At the municipal scale we will explore the revitalization of urban planning in post-reform China, the legacies of state socialism that continue to condition urban form and development today, as well as contemporary urban phenomena such as urban branding, ‘ghost cities,’ villages-in-the-city, and new town development. Finally, we will explore the neighborhood scale focusing in particular on transformations in urban governance, the legacies of the socialist work unit, the rise of gated housing compounds, and the politics of urban community development in China’s shifting structures of class, ethnicity, and citizenship. Throughout, attention will be paid to the adequacy of broader urban theory in analyzing China’s urban geographies, as well as the ways the urban experience in China suggests interventions in urban theories which have been dominated by the Euro-American urban experience.

Course Requirements

1. Class participation (50%). This includes completing all required reading, as well as completing any assigned reading questions for those readings, prior to class. It also includes making a final in-class presentation (no more than 15 minutes) of your final project. While you are expected to actively participate in class discussions, your participation grade does not depend on your oratorical skills (or lack thereof).

2. Final project (50%). This will be a research paper focusing on a critical aspect of China’s urban geographies. Topic statement and preliminary research questions are due on 3/14; preliminary bibliography is due 4/11. The final paper itself is due 5/2. Final papers must be formatted in 12 pt font, double-
Course Schedule

I Nation

1/17 – Urbanization in China – pre- and post-reform patterns

Required

Optional

1/24 – China’s urban transformation – legacies of state socialism

*Venue: Room G12, May Hall, HKU

Required

Optional

1/31 – NO CLASS – Lunar New Year Break

2/7 – Cities and restructuring – from state socialism to neoliberalism?

Required

Optional
II City
2/14 – Urban planning: contingencies of land control
Required
Optional

2/21 – Urban planning and the aesthetics of discontent
*Venue: Room G11, May Hall, HKU
Required
Optional

2/28 – Spectacular and speculative urbanism
Required
Optional

3/8 – Field Trip to Shenzhen

3/14 – Lobotomized cities; disposable cities
Required
Optional
III Neighborhood
3/21 – Social space and governance in the Mao era
Required

Optional

3/28 – Chengzhongcun: village in the city
*Venue: Room G11, May Hall, HKU*
Required

Optional

4/4 – NO CLASS – Qingming

4/11 – Xiaoqu: the new middle class
Required

Optional

4/18 – Shequ: working class neighborhoods
Required

Optional


4/25 – Class presentations