

**Fall 2008**

**Agrarian Societies  
Culture, Power, History, and Development**

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

Instructors:  
Peter Perdue, History  
K. Sivaramakrishnan, Anthropology  
Elisabeth Wood, Political Science

Meetings: Wednesdays, 1:30 – 3:10 pm  
10 Sachem Street  
Room 105

Discussions: Wednesdays, 3:30-5:20 pm  
10 Sachem Street  
Rooms 105, 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 1,000 words that will use no more than 500 words to summarize the main arguments. The remainder of the response will be used to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the reading in the light of lectures and discussions. At least three of the short 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 or a research proposal of no more than 5,000 words. An outline for the essay or proposal should be discussed with one of the course instructors before departure for Thanksgiving Break (November 21). The final paper will be due at 5 pm on December 19 – 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, and assignment into discussion groups

September 10

Week Two

Lecture by Peter Perdue

**The Origins of Agrarian Life in East Asia:  
Settled Agriculture and Pastoralism [ca 1200 – 600 BCE]**

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

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

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 Peter Perdue

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

**Reading:** Robert B. Marks. 2006. *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China*. New York: Cambridge University Press. ([Yale Internet Resource](#)). Pp. 1–84.

Keith Schoppa. 2002. *Song Full of Tears: Nine Centuries of Chinese Life around Xiang Lake*. Perseus Publishing. Pp. 3–115.

September 24

Week Four

Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

**Colonialism and Agriculture in South Asia**

**Reading:** David Ludden. 1999. *Agrarian History of South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ([Yale Internet Resource](#)).

October 1 Week Five Lecture by Elisabeth Wood

**Political Economy and Moral Economy Approaches to Peasant Rebellion**

**Reading:** Elisabeth Jean Wood. 2003. *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

October 8 Week Six Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

**Rural Development, Green Revolutions, and Postcolonial Nation-building**

**Reading:** James Ferguson. 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

October 15 Week Seven Lecture by Elisabeth Wood

**Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance**

**Reading:** James C. Scott. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. ([Yale Internet Resource](#)).

October 22 Week Eight Lecture by Peter Perdue

**Export Crops and Global Markets:  
Silk, Tea, Porcelain, Sugar, Opium and Tobacco [ca 16th – 19th Century]**

**Reading:** Robert B. Marks. 2006. *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China*. New York: Cambridge University Press. ([Yale Internet Resource](#)). Pp. 163–346.

Keith Schoppa. 2002. *Song Full of Tears: Nine Centuries of Chinese Life around Xiang Lake*. Perseus Publishing. Pp. 115–248.

October 29, 2008 Week Nine Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

**Agricultural Commodities and the Environment in the Twentieth Century**

**Reading/s:** Selections from Richard P. Tucker. 2000. *Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World*. Berkeley: University of California Press. ([Yale Internet Resource](#)).

—“Lords of the Pacific: Sugar Barons in the Hawaiian and Philippine Islands,” pp. 63-129;

—“Banana Republics: Yankee Fruit Companies and the Tropical American Lowlands,” pp. 130-78;

—“The Tropical Cost of the Automotive Age: Corporate Rubber Empires and the Rainforest,” pp. 226-82;  
—“Unsustainable Yield: American Foresters and Tropical Timber Resources,” pp. 345-416.

November 5

Week Ten

Lecture by Elisabeth Wood

**The Politics of Agrarian Property Rights and Reform;  
The *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra* of Brazil**

**Reading:** Zander Navarro. 2000. “Breaking New ground: Brazil’s MST.” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 33(5): 36-39.

Angus Wright and Wendy Wolford. 2003. “Now it is Time: The MST and Grassroots land Reform in Brazil.” Institute for food and Development Policy: Food First Backgrounder 9(2): 1-4.

Wendy Wolford. Forthcoming, 2009. *This Land is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meaning(s) of Land in Northeastern Brazil*. Winston-Salem: Duke University Press.

November 12

Week Eleven

Lecture by K. Sivaramakrishnan

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

**Reading:** Philip Cornford. 2001. *Origins of the Organic Movement*. Edinburgh, Floris.

Mark Elvin. 2004. *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China*. New Haven: Yale University Press. ([Yale Internet Resource](#)). Pp. 216–72.

November 19

Week Twelve

Lecture by Peter Perdue

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

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

December 3

Week Thirteen

Lecture by Elisabeth Wood

**The Social Processes and Legacies of Civil War**

**Reading:** Stephen C. Lubkemann. 2008. *Culture in Chaos: An Anthropology of the Social Condition in War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.