

Course Form for PKU Summer School International 2025

Course Title	Title in English: Social Anthropology and China Studies
	Title in Chinese: 社会人类学与中国研究
Teacher	ZHANG Lisheng
First day of classes	June 30, 2025
Last day of classes	July 25, 2025
Course Credit	2 credits
Course Description	
Objective:	
<p>Social anthropology initially emerged as one of the four major sub-disciplines of anthropology, alongside physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistic anthropology. During the early 20th century, it progressively diverged from the broader anthropological framework to establish itself as an independent social scientific discipline. Functionalism and structural-functionalism, as developed by Bronisław Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, have constituted the theoretical and methodological foundation of modern British social anthropology. Its distinctive characteristics include an emphasis on the micro-level analysis of small-scale communities or ethnic groups, as well as a holistic approach to culture and an analytical focus on the interrelationships of social institutions.</p> <p>In the early twentieth century, functionalist perspectives and methodologies of social anthropology were introduced to China by pioneering sociologists and anthropologists including Wu Wenzao and Fei Xiaotong, thereby laying the groundwork for anthropological research on Chinese society. This course is designed to revolve around the classic themes and seminal texts of Chinese anthropological research, guiding students to comprehend the developmental trajectory, core concerns, and contemporary advancements of social anthropology in China.</p>	
Pre-requisites /Target audience	
N/A	
Proceeding of the Course	
<p>Lecture 1: Introduction: Themes, Heroes and Genealogies Lecture 2: The Yenching School and Community Study Lecture 3: A Chinese Phase in Social Anthropology Lecture 4: The Other from within</p>	

Lecture 5: Expeditions, Exhibitions and Material Culture
 Lecture 6: Building a National Museum of Anthropology
 Lecture 7: Family, Kinship and Lineage Organisation
 Lecture 8: Market and Social Structure
 Lecture 9: Reform of Anthropology and the Anthropology of Reform
 Lecture 10: China and Civilisational Anthropology
 Lecture 11: From Chinese Diaspora to Overseas Ethnography
 Lecture 12: A Sinic Perspective in World Anthropology

Assignments (essay or other forms)

Essay of 7000-8000 words

Evaluation Details

20% In-class presentation (date to be decided on the first day of class)
 80% Essay (7000-8000 words essay on a related topic)

Text Books and Reading Materials

See Class Schedule

Academic Integrity (If necessary)

CLASS SCHEDULE

(Subject to adjustment)

Session 1: *China as the Other*

Date:

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)

The emergence of social anthropological research on China was a multifaceted process, driven by the confluence of national imperatives and broader global intellectual currents. It laid the foundation for a vibrant and evolving field that continues to engage with the complexities of Chinese society in the contemporary era. This introductory session is designed to contextualize the relationship between social anthropology and China within the broader intellectual histories of anthropology and sinology.

Lecture 1: Introduction: Themes, Heroes and Genealogies

Lecture 2: The Yenching School and Community Study

Lecture 3: A Chinese Phase in Social Anthropology

【Questions】

Question 1: What are the theories and methods characteristic of modern social anthropology?

Question 2: How did modern social anthropology influence the community-based approach in Yenching School's research.

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】

Fei Xiaotong 1939, *Peasant Life in China : A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Freedman, M. [1962] 1979. 'A Chinese phase in social anthropology', in *The study of Chinese society: essays by Maurice Freedman*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Hsu, F. L. K. 1948. *Under the ancestors' shadow: Chinese culture and personality*. NY: Columbia University Press

Malinowski, B. 1939. Preface, to Fei, Xiaotong, *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

【Assignments for this session (if any)】

Session 2: *Anthropologies in/of China*

Date:

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)

With China's transition from dynastic empire to a nation-state around the turn of the 20th century, the pursuit of a definition of 'Chinese nation' became a pressing concern for China's burgeoning disciplines of anthropology and ethnology. Early Chinese anthropological knowledge-making was centred around reworking the Hua-Yi distinction, or sino-barbarian dichotomy, inherited from the imperial cosmography of a 'central nation' (*huaxia*) and its four neighbouring barbarians (*siyi*), into the concept of 'Chinese Nation' (*Zhonghua Minzu*) as a unified yet multi-ethnic community. The proposition of 'Chinese Nation' then led to a new dichotomy between the Han Chinese majority and non-Han ethnic minorities (*shaoshu minzu*), the latter regarded as the 'other from within', hence the subject of anthropological study. This session explores the other pathways of 'doing anthropology' in China during the 1930s and 1940s, particularly the 'historical ethnological school' based in the Academia Sinica.

Lecture 4: The Other from within
Lecture 5: Expeditions, Exhibitions and Material Culture
Lecture 6: Building a National Museum of Anthropology

【Questions】

Question 1: How did the reworking of the Hua-Yi distinction into the concept of ‘Chinese Nation’ influence the development of early Chinese anthropology and ethnology?

Question 2: What were the key characteristics and contributions of the ‘historical ethnological school’ based in the Academia Sinica during the 1930s and 1940s?

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】

Steinmüller, Hans. 2022. The Aura of the Local in Chinese Anthropology: Grammars, Media and Institutions of Attention Management. *Sociology Lens*. Vol. 35. Issue 1: 69-82

Lu, Tracey L. D. 2014. *Museums in China: Materialized power and objectified identities*. Oxon: Routledge.

Luo, Pan. 2024. Redefining ethnographic museums and ethnographic displays in China: a century-long debate, in Michael Rowlands, Nick Stanley, Graeme Were (eds), *Reframing the Ethnographic Museum: Histories, politics and futures*. London: UCL Press

【Assignments for this session (if any)】

Session 3: *Views from the Periphery*

Date:

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)

From the 1950s to the 1980s, social anthropology of China entered a phase of ‘viewing the center from the periphery’. Anthropologists from the UK and the United States constituted the main research cohort and they conducted fieldwork in overseas Chinese communities, to understand the overall structure and belief systems of Chinese society. This peripheral vantage point, despite its obvious limitations, also yielded significant intellectual advantages. The reliance on indirect methods compelled these foreign ‘China anthropologists’ to engage more actively with secondary sources, particularly historical documents and ethnographic accounts and hence led to an integration of historical and anthropological approaches.

Lecture 7: Family, Kinship and Lineage Organisation
Lecture 8: Market and Social Structure
Lecture 9: Reform of Anthropology and the Anthropology of Reform

【Questions】

Question 1: How did the ‘peripheral view’ influence the anthropology of Chinese society from the 1950s to the 1980s?

Question 2: How did anthropological work of this period influence the later development of social anthropology in China?

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】

Harrell, Steven. 2001. The anthropology of reform and the reform of anthropology: anthropological narratives of recovery and progress in China, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 30: 1, pp. 39-61.

Skinner, G. William. 2010. *Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China*. Columbia University Press.

Wolf, Arthur (ed). 1974. *Religion and ritual in Chinese society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

【Assignments for this session (if any)】

Session 4: *China as the Subject*

Date:

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)

This final session is dedicated to exploring the emerging trajectories and advancements within the field of Chinese anthropology. It encompasses several key areas of contemporary focus, including civilizational anthropology, the study of the Chinese diaspora and overseas ethnography, as well as recent endeavors to cultivate a distinctively Chinese perspective within the global landscape of anthropological theory. All these efforts challenge Western anthropological paradigms by integrating Chinese intellectual resources and creating new interpretative frameworks.

Lecture 10: China and Civilisational Anthropology
Lecture 11: From Chinese Diaspora to Overseas Ethnography
Lecture 12: A Sinic Perspective in World Anthropology

【Questions】

Question 1: How does the emergence of civilizational anthropology in China challenge and contribute to the broader field of anthropology?

Question 2: What are the unique insights and interpretative frameworks that civilizational anthropology brings to the understanding of Chinese society and its place in the global context?

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】

Ji, Zhe and Liang, Yongjia. 2018. Introduction: Towards a New Chinese Anthropology. *cArgo#8 : The new Chinese anthropology / La nouvelle anthropologie chinoise*. pp. 2-6

Liang, Yongjia. 2022. Esteeming goods for non-accumulation, small realms with few people: Interpreting kula with Laozi, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 124, 3: 456-466

Xiang, Biao. 2007. *Global “Body Shopping”: An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry*. Princeton University Press

Wang, Mingming 2009. *Empire and Local Worlds: A Chinese Model for Long Term Historical Anthropology*. Walnut Creek, CA: Leftcoast Press.

Wang, Mingming. 2017. Some turns in a ‘journey to the West’: Cosmological proliferation in an anthropology of Eurasia. *Journal of the British Academy*, 5, 201–250

【Assignments for this session (if any)】

Session 5: *Title*

Date:

【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)

【Questions】

【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】

【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 6: <i>Title</i>	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)	
【Questions】	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 7: <i>Title</i>	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)	
【Questions】	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 8: <i>Title</i>	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)	

【Questions】	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 9: <i>Title</i>	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)	
【Questions】	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	
Session 10: <i>Title</i>	Date:
【Description of the Session】 (purpose, requirements, class and presentations scheduling, etc.)	
【Questions】	
【Readings, Websites or Video Clips】	
【Assignments for this session (if any)】	

A CV of 250-300 words and a high-resolution personal photo should also be provided

ZHANG Lisheng is assistant professor of anthropology at the Department of Sociology, Peking University. His sole-authored monograph *Jianchuan Museum Complex: Memory, Ethics and Power in Chinese Private Heritage* (Bloomsbury forthcoming), which investigates China's most high-profile private museum, is based on his PhD research undertaken at the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

Education

PhD 2020 (Anthropology/Archaeology), University College London;
MA 2014 (Anthropology/Cultural Heritage Studies), University College London;
BA 2013 (English), Zhejiang University.

Research Interests

Social Anthropology, Material Culture Studies, Museum Anthropology

Courses Taught

Undergraduate courses:

Anthropological museums and the display of culture (2024)

History of Anthropology (2024)

Economic Anthropology (2024)

Graduate courses:

Social Anthropology and China Studies (2024)

Anthropological Methodology (2024)

Selected Publications

Zhang, Lisheng. 2025 "The Jianchuan Museum Complex: Ethics and Politics in China's Private Museum Practice". in *The Museum in Asia*. Yunci Cai (ed). London: Routledge.

Zhang, Lisheng. 2024. Heritage as a Foreign Country. *Dushu*. 2024 (6): 120-128

Zhang, Lisheng, and David Francis. 2024. The Re-Crafting of Design: Towards an Ethnographic Perspective in Chinese Exhibition Design. in *Museum Exhibition Design Histories*, Claire Wintle, Kate Guy, Hajra Williams (eds), London: Routledge.

Zhang, Lisheng. 2023. Memories from the Margins: Remembering the 'Red Age' in a Chinese Private Museum. *Museum Worlds*. 11 (2023): 95-10.

Zhang, Lisheng. 2022. Museums and meaning-making: the ethics of a private museum in China. *Bowuyuan (Museum)*. Vol.2. pp. 97-105 [Chinese]

Zhang, Lisheng. 2022. What heritage is and what heritage does. *Wenbo Xuekan (Journal of Archaeology and Museology)*. Vol. 2. pp. 115-121 [Chinese]

Zhang, Lisheng. 2022. Ambivalent Nostalgia: Commemorating Zhiqing in the Jianchuan Museum Complex. *Made in China Journal*. Vol.7 Issue 1.

<https://doi.org/10.22459/MIC.07.01.2022.08>

Zhang, Lisheng. 2021. "'Slave(s)' to the Great Museum: Heritage, Labour and Ethics in the Jianchuan Museum Complex". in *Grassroots Values and Local Cultural Heritage in China*. H. Evans and M. Rowlands (eds). Lanham: Lexington Books

Zhang, Lisheng. 2021. "Complex collections, contentious memories: reflections on the Jianchuan Museum Cluster". In *Cultural China 2020*. S. Kehoe and G. Wielander (eds). London: University of Westminster Press