



CIEE Beijing, China

Course title:	Environmental Conditions and Public Perception in Contemporary China
Course number:	ENVI 3003 BJCH / POLI 3004 BJCH
Programs offering course:	Sustainable Development/ Intensive Chinese Language
Language of instruction:	English
U.S. Semester Credits:	3
Contact Hours:	45
Term:	Spring 2020

Course Description

This course examines the current state and recent changes in environmental conditions in China, including pressing issues like over-utilization of natural resources, urban expansion into farmlands, desertification, loss of grasslands, pollution and waste management issues, and cross-border impacts, as well as conservation efforts, and distribution and protection of endangered species. The course also looks at changing public perceptions and awareness of environmental issues, as well as the works of environmental NGOs and individual activists, and the functions of mainstream Chinese media.

The course includes a dedicated part on methodologies for sustainability assessment.

Learning Objectives

This course is designed to help students:

- Recognize the main features of China's geography, including major landforms, waterways, climate patterns, and their impact on sustainability;
- Gain an understanding of the major environmental challenges China is facing and their meaning in terms of an effective sustainable development;
- Recognize the interrelated roles that government institutions and officials, the media, NGOs, activists, and ordinary Chinese people play in China's environmental crisis;
- Achieve a basic knowledge on the fundamental concepts to consider in the use and interpretation of the most common sustainability indicators.

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course; however previous experience in the social and environmental sciences is beneficial.

Methods of Instruction



The course will combine traditional teaching with a more participative approach. Presentations and other material will be shown in class to illustrate the different topics and active student participation will be requested at all time and will contribute to their final judgment. The students will be asked to prepare the assigned readings and be actively involved in the discussion in class. At least once during the semester they will be requested to lead the discussion themselves and this activity will be part of their final judgment as well. Students will also be stimulated to share their personal experiences, both in China and abroad, on the various environmental issues discussed in class and they will be asked to help forming a deeper understanding of the subject by comparing their own experience and knowledge with the specific characteristics of Chinese situation. We may have a guest lecture or site visit in Beijing, which will be scheduled at some point after the beginning of the course.

Course materials

The main readings for this course will be included in the course reader. Supplementary readings will be distributed as PDFs before class. Other videos and presentations will be available upon request.

Assessment and Final Grade

The student's grade will be assessed as follows:

1. Participation in class and side assignments:	25%
2. Discussion leading:	15%
3. Research paper and presentation:	35%
4. Final exam:	25%

Information on the evaluation of these activities can be found below and further details will be given in class.

Course Requirements

Participation in class and side assignments

Class participation is an integral component of this course. You cannot do well in this course without attending punctually. Please arrive at class meetings on time and fully prepared, having completed the assigned readings, reviewed your reading and film notes, and ready to discuss. Your participation will be assessed on the following scale:

A-level: The student attends class, listens and speaks in a respectful manner, demonstrates familiarity with the reading and lecture material, and can articulate the three-pillar model and apply it to real world examples.



B-level: The student attends class, listens and speaks in a respectful manner, and demonstrates familiarity with the reading and lecture material.

C-level: The student attends discussion section and listens and speaks in a respectful manner.

Per CIEE guidelines, each unexcused absence will cost 2% while the penalty for being late is 1% of your total grade. In addition, *internet surfing, texting, or working on other courses during discussion section constitutes a kind of mental absence and will lead to a loss of all participation points for that day.*

Aside from active participation, you will be requested to contribute to class by sharing your experiences and brief researches with the teacher and your colleagues in simple spoken form or, in some cases, by giving a short presentation. These assignments will also contribute to the global final evaluation (more details on this will be given in class).

Discussion leading

You will lead one or two discussions of specific readings for the class. These exercises are designed to encourage students to develop abilities to critically comprehend complex issues and clearly communicate their ideas with their colleagues in a seminar setting. It is important for the discussant to demonstrate to the class how the assigned readings are situated within the broader discussion on sustainability and their experiences living in China. In addition, you will be responsible to facilitate class participation by asking informed questions and by constructing roadmaps of comprehension in the presentation. You will be graded based on your familiarity with the assigned readings and analytical engagement with the topics of the week. Please feel free to contact me in advance if you have any question.

Final paper and presentation

You will be asked to prepare a research paper of 10-15 pages, double spaced, on a relevant environmental issue in China, agreed with the teacher. The paper will need to make use of the concepts and instruments discussed in class and present an original analysis of the subject. In order to help you organize your workload, you will define with the teacher a timeline that indicates some intermediate steps during the construction of your research and that will include some moments of discussion with the teacher, so that he can provide guidance and feedback along the way.

Late papers will be marked down 5% after the first day and 1% every day afterwards.

Before the end of the course, you will give a presentation (around 30-45 minutes) to the class on the outcomes of your research, answering your colleagues' and teacher's questions. In addition, you will sign up to critique and discuss a fellow student's research. These exercises are designed to help students to become better presenters and discussants in future academic and corporate settings. More instruction on the assignment will be shared during the course.

Final Exam



The final written exam will consist in a short series of questions to test your understanding on the topics covered during the course. Further details will be given in class.

Honor code & plagiarism

You agree to pursue your studies with honor and integrity. Plagiarism - using another person's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgment - will not be tolerated in any form, and is grounds for an F grade for the course and other disciplinary action.

Weekly Schedule (Tentative)

Week 1 Introduction to the class and to China's geography

Introduction to sustainability and the role of environment.
A discussion of the role of environment in sustainability and of the characteristics it imposes on the methods to evaluate sustainability.
Readings: Pintér et al. 2012

China's geography and climate.
Readings: Veeck 2007 (Chapter 2: "China's Natural Environments")

Week 2 Environmental History of China

A history of the environment and its modifications in China.
Readings: Elvin 1993

The environmental policies during Mao era.
Readings: Shapiro 2001 (Chapter 2: "Deforestation, famine...")

Week 3 The condition of Land and Land Cover – Part 1

Agricultural Land in China. A review of the state of agricultural land in China and its capability to fulfill the country's needs.
Readings: Smil 1999

Pastures and grasslands. An insight in policies for protection of grasslands and their impact on pastoralists life.
Readings: Yeh 2005

Week 4 The condition of Land and Land Cover – Part 2

Forest management and wood supply. An analysis of China forest sector and on the challenges to achieve sustainable forest management.
Readings: Demurger et al 2009



Desertification. A discussion on the problem of land degradation, its causes and impacts, in China.
Readings: Wang and Wu 2005

Week 5 Environmental Governance in China – Part 1

The role of national government. The structure of control over China's environment and the challenges of managing such vast, complex country.

Readings: Shapiro 2012 (Chapter 3 "State-led environmentalism")

Pressures from civil society: The role of NGOs. Analysis of the participation of citizens to the environmental debate through NGOs and GONGOS.

Readings: Shapiro 2012 (Chapter 5 "Public participation and...")

Week 6 Environmental Governance in China – Part 2

Pressures from civil society: The role of citizens. Analysis of the growth of environmental protests and the role of citizens in shaping environmental policy.

Readings: Johnson 2010

Student's presentations on their experience with Environmental Governance in the USA.

Week 7 The evaluation of Sustainability

Sustainability Assessment and Indicators. A review on the inadequacies of GDP to represent progress/wellbeing and an analysis of the peculiarities of sustainability assessment methods.

Readings: Hall and Matthews 2008. Costanza 1997.

Week 8 The problem of feeding China

Food production and the environment. An insight into China's food production industry.

Readings: Schneider 2011

Week 9 China's Urbanization

Urbanization in China. A history of the urban growth in China, from its early history to the acceleration over the last decades.

Readings: Friedmann 2005 (Chapters 1 and 2: "Historical traces"; "Regional policies")



Urban Ecology. An insight on an environmental approach to the study of urban characteristics.

Readings: White 2002. Building the ecological city (Part I)

Week 10

Water resources and management in China

Water Scarcity and management. A discussion on the problems of water management in China.

Readings: Liu and Speed 2009

Water for Energy production – China’s dams. A discussion on the various impacts of large hydroelectric projects in China.

Readings: Hvistendahl 2008

Week 11

China’s Energy Policy

Energy policy in China. A discussion on the various aspects of energy policy in China.

Readings: TBA

Week 12

Air Pollution

Air pollution. A review of the characteristics and reasons of the air pollution problem in China.

Readings: Fang et al 2009 & Tilt 2009 (Chapter 4: “The environmental costs of progress”)

Week 13

Waste production and management

Waste management. A discussion on the problem of waste management in a fast growing consumers society.

Readings: Zhang et al 2010

Student’s presentations - Final discussion and remarks

Hand in the final paper.

Course Materials

Readings

Costanza et al. "The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital." Nature 387 (1997).



Démurger, Sylvie, Hou Yuanzhao, and Yang Weiyong. "Forest Management Policies and Resource Balance in China An Assessment of the Current Situation." *The Journal of Environment & Development* 18.1 (2009): 17-41.

Elvin, Mark. 1993. "Three thousand years of unsustainable growth: China's environment from archaic times to the present." *East Asian History* 6.

Fang, Ming, Chak K. Chan, and Xiaohong Yao. "Managing air quality in a rapidly developing nation: China." *Atmospheric Environment* 43.1 (2009): 79-86.

Friedmann, John. *China's urban transition*. London, 2005.

Hall, Jon, and Erica Matthews. "The measurement of progress and the role of education." *European Journal of Education* 43.1 (2008): 11-22.

Hvistendahl, Mara. "China's Three Gorges dam: an environmental catastrophe?" *Scientific American* 25 (2008).

Johnson, Thomas. "Environmentalism and NIMBYism in China: promoting a rules-based approach to public participation." *Environmental Politics* 19.3 (2010): 430-448.

Liu, Bin, and Robert Speed. "Water resources management in the People's Republic of China." *Water Resources Development* 25.2 (2009): 193-208.

Pintér, László, et al. "Bellagio STAMP: Principles for sustainability assessment and measurement." *Ecological Indicators* 17 (2012): 20-28.

Schneider, Mindi. 2011. *Feeding China's pigs: implications for the environment, China's smallholder farmers and food security*. Report for Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

Shapiro, Judith. 2001. *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Studies in Environment and History).

Shapiro, Judith. 2012. *China's environmental challenges*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Smil, Vaclav. 1999. "China's agricultural land." *The China Quarterly* 158, pp. 414-429.

Tilt, Bryan. *The Struggle for Sustainability in Rural China: Environmental Values and Civil Society*. Columbia University Press, 2010.

Veeck, Gregory, ed. *China's geography: globalization and the dynamics of political, economic, and social change*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.



Wang, Tao and Wei Wu "Sandy desertification in northern China" In Kristen A. Day *China's environment and the challenge of sustainable development* (2005): 233-247.

White, Rodney. *Building the ecological city*. CRC Press, 2002.

Yeh, Emily T. "Green governmentality and pastoralism in western China:'Converting pastures to grasslands'." *Nomadic peoples* 9.1-2 (2005): 1-2.

Zhang, Dong Qing, Soon Keat Tan, and Richard M. Gersberg. "Municipal solid waste management in China: Status, problems and challenges." *Journal of Environmental Management* 91.8 (2010): 1623-1633.