ANTH 5020 – ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELD METHODS

人類學田野調查方法
(Subject to Modification)

2017/18 Autumn Semester
Instructor: Mark Stevenson (rebkongmark@gmail.com,)
Class meetings: Wednesday, 6:30-9:15 pm, Mong Man Wai Bldg 715
Office Hours: NAH 411, by appointment.

RA: WANG Kai

Summary:

In the hands-on spirit of social anthropology this course is an introduction to practical field methods used for the production and interpretation of social and cultural data, with an emphasis on conducting fieldwork in China. While the focus on practical field methods is aimed at providing a basic tool kit for conducting social science research, it will also be necessary for you to engage with the conceptual and ethical challenges that anthropologists face in a diversity of situations.

“the assumptions of a basically atemporal ethnographic present, of unified cultures, and of neutral observers have been put into question”

Learning Outcomes:

- Understanding of the historical and contemporary context of anthropological research.
- Knowledge of key methods of data collection and interpretation in anthropology.
- Understanding of the components of research design and the research planning and proposal process.
- Appreciation of the conceptual and ethical responsibilities of fieldwork.
- Ability to reflect on, employ and critique social science field methods.

There is one question that, perhaps more than any other, motivates anthropological inquiry. Take people from different backgrounds and place them in the same situation; they are likely to differ in what they make of it. Indeed such difference is something that every anthropologist experiences in the initial phases of fieldwork. But why should this be so?
(Tim Ingold, “Culture, Perception and Cognition,” 2000 [1996])

Course Requirements and Evaluation (further details at the end of this syllabus):
Students are expected to read ahead and participate actively in lecture and tutorial discussions.

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<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Class and tutorial participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>continuous</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. 3 x Reading leadership papers (each 500 words, each 10%)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>continuous</td>
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<td>3. Research Practice Report (2500 words)</td>
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Further detailed instructions will be provided in the first weeks of semester.
Course Description

An Ethnographer who sets out to study only religion, or only technology, or only social organisation cuts out an artificial field for inquiry, and he will be seriously handicapped in his work. (Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 1922)

This course is a postgraduate introduction to the variety of field methods used by anthropologists. Research methods are knowledge frameworks and data collection procedures employed to produce information, information needed to better understand an issue or topic. Field methods are a subset of procedures that are specifically used while conducting fieldwork. Before research can be approved, all institution-based and funded social science projects require a detailed description of the methods that will be employed in the conduct of their research. They are also required to justify their methods, by which is meant an argument for how the selected methods are suited to the aims of the project. They must be feasible in terms of both budget and the production of relevant and significant results. They should also minimise harm or risk to participants.

Beyond the institutional requirements, however, it is important that anyone involved in the production of new knowledge be able to reflect on how that knowledge is produced. As anthropology has evolved as a social science it has in the main become more critical (reflexive) in its application of methods. Understanding this evolution, understanding something of the past development of anthropology’s methods, improves our understanding of why we do things the way we do them now. This includes the recognition that information and data are not just ‘uncovered,’ ‘discovered,’ or ‘collected,’ but are produced through the research process. Thinking about our methods is part of the overall thinking (imagining, reflecting, testing) that creates new insights, insights that in turn contribute to better applied solutions or to theoretical growth in the field. Research methodology is not a matter of mechanically applying a method or procedure and seeing the answer to your research question appear. This last fact can be disappointing for some, exciting for others, but it is unavoidable all the same.

This course is aimed at a practice based introduction to all the above issues and more. Just looking at the two preceding paragraphs, there is a lot to unpack: field, data, data collection, procedures, information, aims, significance, risk, feasibility, interpretation, harm minimization, interpretation, testing, application, and theory. Each time anyone does fieldwork they end up rethinking (theorizing) all of these and more. As researchers think, they also act or do, and you have an opportunity to learn and use participant observation, interviewing (including key informant and focus group), self-reporting, genealogy, archives, structured observation, questionnaires, sense-based methods, person-centred methods (life history, autoethnography), place-based methods, and virtual methods. While many of our examples will be sourced from research conducted in China, I hope we can at the same time link each of these back to ways for thinking ‘the human in general’ (*anthropos*).

Assigned Texts and Required Reading

The following two books will be used extensively:

- **DCA**  

- **DFC**  
DCA should be available at the campus bookstore and on reserve at the CUHK Library. DCF is available as an e-book via the CUHK Library portal. Additional required reading listed in the curriculum will be available via the course Blackboard page. You are also strongly encouraged to look into further reading referred to during the seminars.

Course Programme and Themes

Week 1 (Sep 6): Introducing the Idea of ‘The Field.’
- Course introduction, film, discussion
- No required reading

Please read the following article for discussion in Week 2. Discussion will focus on the sources and sourcing of information supporting the research.


Week 2 (Sep 13): ‘The Field’ Historically Situated.
Telling the story of the history of anthropology’s method can sometimes make it appear far more concrete and clear-cut than it is in actual experience. When reading the selections by Gregg and Levi-Strauss, try to note where and how certainty and uncertainty are expressed.

Required reading:
- Angrosino, Michael V. “Introduction.” (DCA 1-7)

Week 3 (Sep 20). Designing Research: Aligning Questions/Projects, Field and Methods

Having a picture of the entire research cycle helps us envision how the components of research line-up and interrelate. Having an understanding of the range of approaches helps us see how field methods fit different kinds of research situation and question.

Required reading:
- Heimer, Maria. “Field Sites, Research Design and Type of Findings.” (DFC 58-77)
Week 4 (Sep 27): The Forms of the Stories We Gather and Tell

One meaning of the *logos* in anthropology is “to tell (stories).” Much of what forms the basis of qualitative research is collected in the form of stories, and stories are the source of the “richness” of qualitative research. Stories seem to have a special link to life and lived experience, but at the same time, in this respect and others, stories do not all share the same qualities.

*Required reading:*
- deRoche, Constance P. “Exploring Geneology.” *(DCA 19-32)*
- Angrosino, Michael V. “Conducting a Life History Interview.” *(DCA 33-44)*

Week 5 (Oct 4): Analysing and Extending Narratives

As explored in the previous week, much of the data of anthropology comes in the form of stories, and then it is used to tell what m might call “the anthropological” or “the discipline focused” story. How is this process of translation accomplished? What processes does qualitative data have to pass through in order to create a unified research “story”? (See also Week 12.)

*Required reading:*

Week 6 (Oct 11): Working with Existing Sources

Most anthropologists today work in societies where there has been a considerable history of literacy, and they cannot ignore the existing sources (statistics, local histories, official documents, business records, the list is quite long). These are particularly useful where “traditional” forms of access to a research population such as a full “village study” is limited. Sometimes they are useful due to the specific area of life forming the focus of the research project.

*Required reading:*
- Thøgersen, Stig. “Approaching the Field through Written Sources” *(DFC 189-205)*
- Rodriguez, Cheryl, and Yvette Baber. “Reconstructing a Community Through Archival Research.” *(DCA 63-70)*
- Nanda, Serena. “Using a Museum as a Resource for Ethnographic Research.” *(DCA 71-81)*
- Rees, Martha W. “Working with Numerical Data.” *(DCA 109-114)*

Week 7 (Oct 18): Structured Observation

“Participant observation” is often thought to imply unstructured inquiry, learning and following the flow of life in a particular location (the field), yet even the most immersive fieldwork will usually have moments of structured, deliberate observation. Much fieldwork is highly structured (see the FAO RRA paper below), whether by design or other constraints. This structuring comes from two main directions: the kinds of information sought, and the situational constraints on the researchers’ activity.
Required reading:
- Mette Halskov Hansen “In the Footsteps of the Communist Party: Strategies and Dilemmas.” (DFC 81-95)
- Borman, Kathryn, Ellen Puccia, Amy Fox McNulty, and Bill Goddard. “Observing a Workplace.” (DCA 83-90)
- Price, Laurie J. “Carrying Out a Structured Observation.” (DCA 91-98)

Week 8 (Oct 25): Interviews and Questionnaires

Interviews, surveys and questionnaires are direct methods of seeking specific information, and can be planned at almost any stage of a research project. While always having specific aims, they also take many different forms that range from open-ended, qualitative to highly structured and qualitative.

Required reading:
- Bryant, Carol. “Planning and Moderating Focus Group Research.” (DCA 115-127)
- Gustafsson, Björn and Li Shi. “Surveys – Three Ways to Obtain Household Income Data” (DFC 129-152).

Week 9 (Nov 1): Working with Sense Data

The classical product of anthropological fieldwork is a published ethnography (ethnos = people, graphein = writing), and, as with most fields, the emphasis is on a written report. The verbal (i.e. word-based, cf. logos in anthropology) bias of much research has led to a neglect of sensory dimensions of experience. Reorienting anthropology toward the sensorium has been slow, and also overly biased toward the visual. What implications do sensory experiences have for field methods and the presentation of our research findings?

Required reading:
- Bird, S. Elizabeth “Applying Visual Methods in Ethnographic Research.” (DCA 139-148)
- Wallace, Tim. “Participating in an Ethnographic Field School.” (DCA 177-186)

Week 10 (Nov 8): Digital Frontiers

While sensory worlds and experiences have always been part of social life, electronically mediated experience has only been part of social life for the past 150 years, and the pace and scale of that change has increased significantly since the launching of the World Wide Web 1991. This is a very new “village” attracting the attention of anthropologists, and the speed of its evolution is so great that research findings (an methods!) are quickly out-of-date.
Required reading:


Week 11 (Nov 15): Position and Perspective in Research

There are many factors within and outside the field site which impact on the researcher which extend beyond the culture of the communities which are the focus of research. Researching as part of teams and applied projects has its own challenges, as does the research conducted by “insider researchers.” These largely have to do with relationships (positions) and motives (perspectives), and they can have a considerable impact on the research process and its results.

- He Baogang. “Consultancy: A Different Gate to the Field.” (DFC 168-188)
- Thunø, Mette, “In the ‘Field’ Together: Potentials and Pitfalls in Collaborative Research.” (DFC 245-261)

Week 12 (Nov 22): Theory and the Translation of Data.

Theory is one tool we have for “putting it all together,” and as soon as we begin synthesising our data we can be said to be theorising (forming a picture of what is meaningful, and an understanding of why it is).

- O’Brien Kevin J. “Discovery, Research (Re)design, and Theory Building.” (DFC 27-41)

Week 13 (Nov 29):

Class Conference (Presentation of Research Proposal Summary): details to be advised (planned and organised during class discussion).

Final Paper (Research Proposal) Due 29 November

Further Resources:

No-nonsense practical introduction with a focus on education.

Tabulation of approaches, methods, and techniques, and their fit.
Ground breaking paper identifying ‘tracking’ as a method for the new, unstable global era.

A wide ranging collection focused on the conceptual, experiential and ethical challenges of fieldwork.

A through breakdown of the steps and stages of participant observation, with a humanistic, qualitative emphasis.

The chapter and the book as a whole contain many insights into organising research in Chinese communities in culturally and geographically diverse locations.

**Academic Honesty**

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on honesty in academic work submitted by students, and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on academic dishonesty. While “academic dishonesty” is the overall name, there are several sub-categories as follows:

(i) Plagiarism
(ii) Undeclared multiple submission
(iii) Cheating in tests and examinations
(iv) All other acts of academic dishonesty

Any related offence will lead to disciplinary action including termination of studies at the University.

香港中文大學對學生作業有嚴格的學術誠信要求，違反學術誠信的個案，一律以零容忍政策處理。「違反學術誠信」是一個統稱，包括以下類別：

(i) 抄襲
(ii) 未有聲明重覆使用作業
(iii) 測驗及考試作弊
(iv) 所有其他違反學術誠信行為

違反有關規定的學生予以懲處，嚴重者包括開除學籍。

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at [http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/).

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

In the case of group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions should there be any plagiarized contents in the group project, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed directly or indirectly to the plagiarized contents.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students’ uploading of the soft copy of the assignment.

Assignments without the properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.
Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide. The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submission. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one’s own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

Further information on academic honesty can be found at:
http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/