Qualitative Methods

Intensive course, Zhejiang University

General outline
This course provides an introduction to ethnographic methods and practical experience with a small field study. For students of China studies, the exercises during these two weeks will form the basis for an exam paper. For students of anthropology, the course is followed by two weeks of data collection for their field projects. The course will cover key aspects of qualitative research, such as formulating a research problem, research questions, methodological choices, analysis, ethical concerns and presentation of findings. Readings and teacher presentations will be combined with practical exercises, with emphasis on the latter. Mode of teaching will combine class presentations, plenary discussions, group work, instruction and experience-sharing. During the period of the course, students will concurrently develop their independent projects that will form the basis for exam papers. Anthropology students must have their problem statements approved by the teachers before
they begin their independent field research. All literature must be read in preparation for the course. It is expected that the students will collaborate during common exercises (topic: Movement – motion and mobility) during the course. The course stresses hands-on activities and learning-by-doing. Therefore, there will be many practical exercises and much homework during the course. This will not leave time to read between classes, so all literature must be read in preparation for the course.

The course is planned as a one-week intensive course for Scandinavian MA students in China Studies, and counts as a total of 5 ECTS (135 hours). It will take place at a Chinese university campus and will be co-taught by one teacher from the Chinese university and one teacher from a Scandinavian university. The languages of instruction will be Chinese and English.

**Prerequisites**

It is assumed that students:

- Read and speak Modern Standard Chinese (Putonghua) at a level corresponding to the requirements for a BA degree in China Studies at a Scandinavian university
- Have comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture and society
- Have a basic knowledge of cultural study research methods

**Aims of the course**

The main aims of the course are:

- that students learn to design a China-related research project based on qualitative methods.
- that students gain practical experience in qualitative research methods, primarily observations and interviews.

To achieve these aims the course will include:

- discussions of the potential and limitations of qualitative research methods.
- planning, conducting and reflecting critically on an observation.
- planning, conducting, transcribing and reflecting critically on interviews.
• reading academic texts in Chinese and English, as well as mass and social media texts in Chinese about the research theme.

**Course outline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Theme/Title</th>
<th>Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day One</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The common project topic: Motion, movement, mobility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Introduction to ethnographic methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Framing and designing a project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Project description requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise 1: Brainstorming, framing and developing project description on the common project topic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch break</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon session</td>
<td>Exercise 2: Inspirational walk in the neighbourhood – “a grand tour”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assignment 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write up first impressions. Work on project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Access, positions and conflicts in the field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Field notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise 1: Role play in class about access.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch break</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon session</td>
<td>Exercise 2: Participant-observation 'in the field'.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Assignment 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write up field notes and share with the group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a draft research problem and background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
section for the individual project description.
Set up interview appointments for day three.

**Excursion:** a social excursion is planned between day two and three.

## Day Three

### Morning session
- Qualitative interviewing – forms and techniques
- The interview guide
- Transcription

Exercise 1: Interview exercise in classroom using audio recorder (mobile phone).
Exercise 2: Develop an interview guide for a semi-structured interview.

### Afternoon session
Exercise 3: Conduct a semi-structured interview 'in the field'.

**Assignment 3**
Transcribe sections of the interview, share transcripts in the group and read each other’s transcriptions. Work on all sections of the individual project description. Prepare a presentation of max. 3 slides. Set up another interview or focus group interview appointment for day four.

## Day Four

### Morning session
- Cultural context, sensitive issues and politeness
- Project design (cont.)
- Focus groups

Exercise 1: Mutual brainstorming on own projects.

### Afternoon session
Exercise 2: Prepare and perform a focus group in class.

**Assignment 4**
Conduct another semi-structured interview (or focus group interview if possible). Transcribe sections of the interview.
Learning activities

The course combines lectures, seminars and group discussions held in English and Chinese with a field trip. Students will be given assignments to prepare before each respective class session. Based on the course and the field trip, the students are required to present ideas for a final paper on the last day of the course and to hand in a final essay at a later date via email.

Attendance is compulsory according to the regulations of the Chinese university and students...
are expected to come to classes well prepared. Students will receive the list of readings about one month before the course starts and are expected to have read at least the mandatory texts before the beginning of the course.

**Course requirements/ examination**

The students’ performance during the course, including active class attendance, written assignments, and the final paper count towards the final grade for the course. Field projects may be written within the framework of the common topic and must be undertaken in groups of two (in special cases three) students. Exam papers must be written in pairs (8-10 pages including references and notes). The paper has to include: a) an introduction presenting the research question; b) a presentation of the methodology used for collecting data; c) reflections on methodological challenges in the project; d) a discussion of the results of the investigation; e) a conclusion; and f) a list of references that include at least five academic sources that are used in the paper. Only papers including *all of these points* will be able to pass, and papers will be graded passed/not passed.

**Course Material**


