

Course Title: Communication in Contemporary Chinese Contexts

Course Number: COMM 3810 001 Special Topics in Communication

Place: Burton Hall 208

Time: Jan 19 – May 7, 2010

Instructor: Todd L. Sandel, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Department of Communication

## **Course Description**

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the study of communication in Chinese contexts in a range of disciplines such as anthropology, communication, psychology, and international business. This is motivated in part by a recognition that how Chinese people interact, whether they live in the “Chinese” heartland such as mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, in the Asian Chinese communities of Singapore, Malaysia, or Indonesia, or in the growing Chinese diasporic lands such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, or Vancouver, B.C., has a number of common features: the importance of family and interpersonal relationships, and an emphasis on education and hard work. These, however, are tempered by the realization that context plays an important role and may also lead to differences in practice and belief. For this course we will explore these issues, all with the aim of understanding what and how Chinese people, or people in Chinese contexts (the two are not necessarily the same) communicate.

### **Class Objectives:**

1. To understand the Chinese concept of self, family, and community;
2. To understand the Chinese style of discourse and communication common in interpersonal relationships;
3. To understand how a Chinese style of communication affects and influences communication with non-Chinese.

### **Course Structure:**

**First section** will focus on situating China and the Chinese sense of self, family, and community. We begin with an overview of life in China today, going on a journey with Rob Gifford across the vast expanse of land and peoples that are in China. After this overview, we pull back and enter life in a small village in rural Taiwan through a book by Charles Stafford, growing and learning to see the world as part of a *jia*, a family, that extends beyond the walls of ones house to encompass the community and members near and far away. This vision is then expanded as we look the literature on personality, and make comparisons between Chinese and non-Chinese.

**Second section** will focus on interpersonal communication, which is often characterized by the effort to build and maintain *guanxi* (relationships). The Chinese style tends to be indirect, preserving harmony on the surface that conceals underlying disharmony and competition. In this section we will also consider how communication technologies have served to build and link Chinese communities outside Chinese-majority lands, creating a diasporic community which remains connected to its Chinese “root.”

**Third section** will look at the interaction between Chinese and non-Chinese styles of

communication, with an emphasis on how it affects international business. One case that we will consider is the McDonald's corporation, which in a short time has developed a successful franchise model that has penetrated markets in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China. We will also look at how Chinese-based businesses are successfully competing in the global market, influenced by what Bond and Hofstede call the "Confucian work dynamic" which focuses on long-term investment and gains, over short-term ones.

### **Readings:**

1. Articles posted on D2L (learn.ou.edu)
2. Gifford, R. (2008). *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power* (2008). Random House: ISBN 0812975243
3. Stafford, C. (1995). *The Roads of Chinese Childhood: Learning and Identification in Angang*. New York: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0521026563.
4. Watson, J. (Ed.) (1997). *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia, Second Edition*. (2006). Stanford, CA: Stanford U Press. ISBN: 0804749892

### **Class Assignments and Grading:**

#### Weekly Class Participation and Response (40%)

For each week you will expect to be prepared to discuss the assigned reading. To prepare, you will write a short (1-2 page) reflection paper in response to a question posted for that week.

#### Term Paper (40%)

You will research and write a modest length, 8-10 page paper on a topic of Chinese communication. Topic and guidelines for completing this assignment will be discussed throughout the semester.

#### Final Presentation (20%)

The last weeks of class will be an opportunity to present to the class what you have learned from your semester-long research. Guidelines and further instructions will be posted later.

### **Tentative Topics and Reading schedule**

Week 1: Class Introduction; Situating China and the Chinese  
Gifford *China Road*, Intro-Ch. 11

Week 2: Understanding China as place and peoples  
Gifford *China Road*, 12-23; Tu (D2) "The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese"

Week 3: Learning and Growing in a Chinese Community  
Stafford *Roads* Intro, Chapters 1-4; Sandel (D2L) "Kinship address"; Fung (D2L)

“Becoming a Moral Child”; Chao (D2L) “Chinese parenting”

- Week 4: The Home, Community, and Religion  
Stafford *Roads* Ch. 5-9; Jordan (D2) Selections
- Week 5: A Developing Chinese Personality  
Cheung et al (D2L) “Development of Chinese Personality; Fung et al (D2L) “Listening is Active; Miller et al (D2L) “Personal storytelling”
- Week 6: Communication within the Family, Harmony and Competition  
Chang (D2L) “Harmony as performance”; Chang (D2L) “Learning speaking skills”; Sandel (D2L) “Narrated relationships”
- Week 7: Arranging Marriages within and across borders  
Jordan (D2L) Chinese matchmakers; Clark (D2L) “Foreign marriage”; Wang & Chang (D2L) “Commodification”; Sandel & Liang (D2L) Foreign brides
- Week 8: Global ties and Global Chinese community  
Chang (D2L) “Reconfiguring”; Ong (D2L) Flexible Citizenship; Ma (D2L) “Internet as town square”
- Week 9: Spring Break
- Week 10: The Chinese Face and Orientation to Business  
Hofstede (D2L) “Long-term orientation”; Zhou & Logan (D2L) “New Chinese Metropolis; Rudolph & Lu (D2L) “Taipei and Shanghai”; Hertz (D2L) “Face in the Crowd”
- Week 11: The Case of McDonald’s: Localizing the Global  
*Golden Arches* Intro, 1-3
- Week 12: Business Relations, Good and Bad  
*Golden Arches* 6; Greider (D2L) “Facai”; Friedman (D2L) “Dell Theory”
- Week 13: Chinese and Non-Chinese interaction  
Hartzell (D2L) “Chinese negotiation”
- Week 14: In-Class Presentations & Final Paper
- Week 15: In-Class Presentations & Final Paper