This proseminar on Chinese visual culture will explore the tensions and elasticity of media as a simultaneously local and global mode of sociality and cultural politics. Through close readings of contemporary media and visual culture theory, alongside ethnographies of Chinese visual cultural production, we will examine how media forms and media technologies engage and engender particular ways of being in/knowning the world that are equally specific to local contexts and expressions of global connectivity and potentialities. Methodologically, we will explore the approach and possibilities of media ethnography, taking a “ground-up” perspective to the critical analysis of visual forms and mediated practices in the world today. This multi-modal approach forces us to confront often taken for granted assumptions about (visual) media: as information, as knowledge, as constitutive of society. “Media” for our purposes will encompass a range of technologies and types, including television, radio, film, photography, print, and online; state-sponsored, commercial, underground, and independent; verbal, visual, and interactive. Seminar discussions will challenge us to consider media both as a text and as a social context, with a particular emphasis on developing productive methodological connections and analytical insights between approaches in cultural anthropology, film and media studies, and visual culture.

Readings may include: