Lecture Abstract for Fong Yim Fun Distinguished Lecture:

**Better Life: The Shanghai Expo and the State of Futurity**

By Christopher Connery

The Shanghai Expo, held between May 1 and October 31, was a spectacle of massive scale, attracting over 70 million visitors, the great majority of whom were Chinese. The enormous scale of the Expo is particularly noteworthy, given that in the view of many critics, the age of the world exposition had passed, and expos were no longer important venues for bringing new vision to the world. In addition to the site itself, the Expo was also the occasion, especially in Shanghai, of a national mobilization, registering the state's identification with urbanism and urban life. This represents a major shift in China's self-conception, and the particular nature of the Expo's urban vision, as well as its scale, reveals much about current state ideology. The Expo also gave, however, a multifaceted vision of futurity--of a future urbanism that would promise, as the Expo's official slogan stated, "better life." At a time when futurity discourse is on the wane in much of the overdeveloped world--North America and Europe remain in a state of economic crisis to which the dominant official responses are austerity and a scaling back of earlier versions of developmentalism, modernization, social guarantees, and other forms of retrenchment, the Chinese state's identification with development and large-scale spatial reorganization makes China a center of futurity in the world today. This talk analyzes the nature of the Shanghai Expo's vision of futurity and of urban life, and relates that vision to the reality of current urban transformation in China.