
UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY CHINA: TOPICS IN CHINESE CULTURE AND SOCIETY

AREA: HUMANITIES

COURSE Nr: 75

SESSIONS: 15
CREDITS: 3

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OBJECTIVES

The objective of this course is to enable participants to become familiar with certain aspects of Chinese culture and society that will lead them to a deeper understanding of the realities of present-day China. A country that has witnessed spectacular and sustained growth over the past quarter century, China is also heir to a rich cultural heritage. Its people are justly proud of this legacy and it is extremely gratifying to them when foreigners show their familiarity and appreciation of it. Accordingly, if we approach any type of encounter -- commercial, political, cultural or tourism -- with a basic grounding in the culture, it is sure to be welcomed and valued by our Chinese partners. It goes without saying that a respectful appreciation of China's rich civilization can lead to more fluid relations, and help create a climate of confidence for any type of undertaking.

Apart from the direct applications of an acquired familiarity with the culture in enhancing our relations with China, there is no question we are dealing with one of the most venerable and richest civilizations in the entire world, one that has exerted a tremendous influence on the countries of East Asia as a whole. In this new era of globalization, a parochial or Eurocentric approach to our planetary reality is no longer adequate; we are expected to become more receptive to cultures and societies other than our own. This course is intended to serve as a gateway to China's cultural heritage. In our class sessions, we will be examining certain aspects of that tradition in the light of the impact they have made on contemporary Chinese society, while taking a critical look at some of the clichés regarding China that persist in our own discourse.

METHODOLOGY

The course is structured as a process for acquiring a deeper understanding of contemporary China by examining significant aspects of its culture and society, re-evaluating the clichés that tend to be retailed in the media, and the widespread impression that it is only "the world's factory". Some sessions will open with a spokesperson for one of the groups presenting a summary of news items and commentary regarding China. These examples can refer to China's historical as well as its contemporary reality, as well as to our own cultural environment. In either case, however, they will be directly related to the main discussion topics for the session in question, and all members of the group are expected to contribute to it.

As the course progresses, we will be screening a documentary, a film and other material as a springboard for discussions in which all students are expected to participate. Our discussions will take the reading assignments as their point of departure. It is understood that the required reading list, which will be handed out later in the program, is intended not only for the current session but also for those that may follow. Certain texts may appear polemical to some. In the event, such material has been included on the premise that it too, can serve as grist for class discussions and help us to arrive at a neutral balancing point for each of our sessions.

COURSE OUTLINE

SESSION 1.

Introduction. China and its people. READING: Myron L. Cohen, "Being Chinese: The Peripheralization of Traditional Identity", pp. 113-134 in *Daedalus*. (Spring 1991).

SESSION 2.

What are the languages and dialects spoken in China and what impact has Chinese writing had on the rest of East Asia? The distinctive characteristics of East Asian writing systems and issues concerning the transcription of Chinese. READING: "Language" and "Dialect" in P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*, Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

SESSION 3.

Is China a Confucian civilization? Confucianism and democratization: are they contradictory or incompatible? Asian values and human rights. READING: "Selections from the Analects", pp. 20-33 in WM Theodore de Bary, Wing-Tsit Chan and Burton Watson (comp.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.

SESSION 4.

The Legalism of the First Emperor, and its influence on contemporary society. Maoism and Revolution. Maoist Totalitarianism. READINGS: "The Legalists", pp.122-144 and 218-227 in WM Theodore de Bary, Wing-Tsit Chan and Burton Watson (comp.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1960. Zheng Yi, *Scarlet Memorial. Tales of Cannibalism in Modern China*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996; pp. xi-xxii and 1-21.

SESSIONS 5 & 6.

The archetype of Love in China as vs. the Western archetype of "shining prince rescues princess". Images of China: an excursion into the exotic for Westerners? SCREENING: The film "Judou" by Zhang Yimou.

SESSION 7.

Is appreciation of poetry a sign of distinction? It is in China, and that is why we will be looking at a number of works from the old times and from the golden age of Chinese poetry under the Tang dynasty. READINGS: Selections of Chinese Poems: Chen Zieng, Li Bai, Du Fu, Wang Wei, Tao Yuanming, Su Dongpo and Li Qingzhao.

SESSION 8.

The Chinese classics that form part of the world's literary heritage and that everyone should know about. READING: "Red Chamber Dream", pp. 201-258 in Cyril Birch (ed.) *Anthology of Chinese Literature. From the 14th Century to the Present Day*, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1972.

SESSION 9.

The value of culture when doing business in China. Business Practices and Basic Protocol. READING: John Graham & Mark Lam, "The Chinese Negotiation", *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 81 n° 10, (October 2003), pp. 82-91.

SESSION 10.

The Literary Revolution. Contradictions between past and present, between China and the rest of the world. Literature and political control in contemporary China. Ethics and aesthetics of the "political fairy tales" of Chinese Socialist realism. SCREENING: Excerpts from operas of the Cultural Revolution period. READING: Lu Xun, "A Madman's Diary", pp. 7-17 in Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Godblatt (eds.) *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

SESSION 11.

Women in China: Tradition and modernity. READING: Marina Thorborg, "Where Have All The Young Girls Gone? Fatal Discrimination of Daughters -A Regional Comparison", *China Perspectives*, (January February 2005).

SESSIONS 12 & 13.

Intellectuals and Power in China. Does a dissident movement still exist inside or outside the country following the massacres of 1989? SCREENING: Documentary, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*. READING: Jean-Philippe Béja, "Forbidden Memory, Unwritten History. The Difficulty to Structure an Opposition Movement in the PRC", *New Century Net* (Monterey, California), 4 August 2003.

SESSION 14.

Communism, Nationalism and Economic Patriotism. READING: John Fitzgerald, "The Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism", pp. 56-85 in Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Chinese Nationalism*, Armonk, New York and London, England: M. E. Sharpe, Inc, 1996.

EVALUATION PROCEDURES

The final grade is to be determined on the basis of the following criteria:

a) Class Participation	25%
b) Final Exam	45%
c) Team Activity (oral and written work)	30%

CRITERIA

a) Class Participation:

It is expected that all students will play an active role in class, expressing questions, opinions, issues, and answers. It need hardly be said that it will be essential to have completed the reading assignments and identifying the deeper implications underlying each of the topics we will be discussing in class. Inasmuch as class participation is an important determinant in the final grade, students are required to sign an attendance sheet for each session. Non-attendance at more than 25% of the class sessions will mean that no grade will be issued for this course.

b) Final examination:

The exam will cover all the content included in the course, including reading matter, screenings, group presentations and discussions. In the exam, students will be required to comment on one of two texts, to be chosen by the student, and to write short answers to three out of five additional questions.

c) Team Activity:

Task groups of four or five people will be formed. Each will be responsible for the selection of news bites, identifying issues or discussion topics relevant to the topic of each session. Exhaustive research into Chinese culture is not required; the aim is to identify the problems and challenges for culture and society – those that are specific to China and other countries as well - and look for connections between them as we undertake a deeper examination into the role of the humanities in our society.

Beginning with the third class session, a spokesperson for each group will give a presentation at the beginning of the class. This presentation should last from 7 to 10 minutes and all group members are expected to participate.

In addition, each group is required to hand in a written summary (maximum 2-3 pages) that will be distributed to each member of the team. In preparing their presentation, students are free to refer to the outline given below of questions that can serve as points of departure, although any other questions or issues deemed relevant to the class can most certainly be added to the list. The instructor will be available for further guidance or to suggest additional reading matter relevant to the topic.

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

A more extensive bibliography that will allow for in-depth understanding of each of the topics under discussion is set out below. You will also find a list of questions that may be useful in preparing the in-class presentations that will kick in from the third session. You may propose answers to one or more of the questions, but you are not required to answer all of them. Also included is a select bibliography linked to each of the questions. This, however, is only intended as recommended reading, as each team is at liberty to choose a different question as the basis for its classroom presentation, as long as it is relevant to the topic.

SESSION 1. Introduction. China and its people. READING: Ambrose Yeo-chi King, "Kuan-his and Network Building: A Sociological Interpretation" and pp. 63-84 in *Daedalus*. (Spring 1991).

SESSION 3. What is Confucianism? What is meant by human rights? READING: Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Constitutionalism and Western Legal Traditions in Human Rights in Asian Legal Systems -with Special Focus on Chinese Legal System", February 12, 2007 (<http://www.erenlai.com/media/downloads/jpcMacao.pdf>)

SESSION 4. Who was Mao? What sort of impression do we have of him? Are we aware of the horrors of Maoism? READINGS: Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghost China's Secret Famine*, London: An Oxl Book, 1996. Dali L. Yang, *Calamity and Reform in China. State, Rural Society and Institutional Change Since the Great Leap Famine*, Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1996; pp. 33-41. Kenneth Hill, *Demographic Trends in China from 1950 to 1982*. World Bank Discussion Papers 22. The World Bank, Washington D. C., 1988. Geremie R. Barmé, *Shades of Mao. The Posthumous Cult of Great Leader*, Armonk, New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1996, pp. 3-73.

SESSIONS 5 & 6. What impressions do we have in the West concerning love and sex in China? Do these impressions correspond to reality? READINGS: Katherine Carlitz, "Desire, Danger, and the Body: Stories of Women's Virtue in Late Ming China", pp. 101-124 in Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel and Tyrene White (eds.), *Engendering China. Women, Culture, and the State*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1994. R. H. Van Gulik, "T'ang Dynasty", pp. 170-211 in *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974.

SESSION 7. In what sort of regard are poets held in our culture, and what impression do we mostly have of them? Does poetry have any use other than the pleasure we derive from reading it? Female voices in Chinese poetry. READING: John Timothy Wixted, "The Poetry of Li Ch'ing-chao: A Woman Author and Women's Authorship", pp. 146-169 in Pauline Yu (ed.), *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft129003tp/>

SESSION 8. Which are the Chinese books and authors we are familiar with? What kinds of texts relating to China are most popular in our own cultural environment? READINGS: Luo Guanzhong, "The Battle of the Red Cliff", pp. 5-122 in *The Three Kingdoms. Pilgrimage to the West. Flowers in the Mirror. Excerpts from Three Classical Chinese Novels*, Beijing: Panda Books, 1981. Wu Cheng'en, "The Flaming Mountain", pp. 135-199, in *The Three Kingdoms. Pilgrimage to the West. Flowers in the Mirror. Excerpts from Three Classical Chinese Novels*, Beijing: Panda Books, 1981. "A Yüan Novel", pp. 449-487 in Cyril Birch (ed.) *Anthology of Chinese Literature. From Early Times to the Fourteenth Century*, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1965.

SESSION 9. Do we know basic protocol when negotiating in China? Kwang-Kuo Hwang, "Guanxi and Mientze: Conflict Resolution in Chinese Society", *Intercultural Communication Studies* VII, 1 (1997-98), pp. 17-42 (<http://www.trinity.edu/org/ics/ICS%20Issues/ICS%20VII/ICS-VII-1-%20Hwang.pdf>). Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets, The Art of Social Relationships in China*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994.

SESSION 10. Does literature have any political or social role in our society? What about in Chinese society? What sort of criticism does Lu Xun and other intellectual of the Literary Revolution make in their writings? READING: "The attack on Confucianism" and "The Literary Revolution", pp. 152-163 in WM Theodore de Bary, Wing-Tsit Chan and Burton Watson (comps.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition Volume I*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1960. Lu Xun, "Medicine", pp. 39-49 in *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1954. Lu Xun, "The True Story of A Q", pp. 76-135 in *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Volume One, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956.

What exactly is meant by Socialist realism? A kind of Communist "fairy tale", perhaps? Are these still valid in our age?: READING: Mao Tse-tung, "On Art and Literature", pp. 266-271 in WM Theodore de Bary, Wing-Tsit Chan and Burton Watson (comps.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition Volume II*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1960. Zhou Yang, "Thoughts on Realism". pp. 335-344 in Kirk A. Denton (ed.) *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1996.

SESSION 11. How would you describe the situation of women in China? Search for information about women in contemporary China.

SESSION 12 & 13. To what extent is the role played by intellectuals or sages in Chinese society influenced by tradition? What impressions do we have of the dissident movements inside and outside China before and after the 1989 massacres? READING: Merle Goldman, "A New Relationship between the Intellectuals and the State in the Post-Mao Period", pp. 499-538 in Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee (eds.) *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Liu Binyan, "Sellout by China's Intellectual Elite", *China Rights Forum* no. 2, 2004. <http://www.hrichina.org> Donghai Idao, "The Role of Public Intellectuals", *China Rights Forum* no. 1, 2005c. <http://www.hrichina.org>

SESSION 14. How does nationalism affect China's relations with other countries? Data concerning economic ties between China and Japan. Nationalist controversies between China and Japan. Chinese economic patriotism. READING: Geremie R. Barmé, "To Screw Foreigners is Patriotic: China's Avant-Garde Nationalist", *The China Journal*, no. 34 (Jul. 1995), pp. 205-234.

GENERAL REFERENCE BIBLIOGRAPHY

For contemporary issues, there is an excellent journal in English: *Chinese Perspectives* (<http://www.cefc.com.hk/uk/pc/historique.php>) or in French: *Perspectives chinoises* (<http://www.cefc.com.hk/>). Some articles are on the Website. An interesting newsletter in English with updated news is: <http://rosebud.journalism.berkeley.edu/mailman/listinfo/chinadn-updates>

All the main Chinese journals have an edition in English: *People's Daily* (<http://english.people.com.cn/>) *Xinhua News Agency* (<http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/>) .