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**School of Modern Languages**  
**CHIN 4813: Mao's China and Revolutionary Art**

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## Course Description

This course explores the cultural and artistic transformations of Mao's China (1949–1976), a period, often remembered through narratives of propaganda, censorship, and political upheaval. We will complicate such views by examining how the contested concept and practices of “revolutionary art” engaged with questions of ideology, modernity, and everyday life. Through films, literature, visual art, architecture, popular magazines, and digital archives, students will investigate how art and culture in general functioned as tools of socialist education as well as as sites of creativity, negotiation, and resistance. Alongside close readings and media analysis, the course emphasizes collaborative projects such as digitizing primary sources and creating a public-facing website, through which students can connect historical study with critical reflection and digital humanities practice.

This course is designed as a content course taught at the advanced level of Chinese, where both language learning and historical/cultural study serve as its central pillars. **All aspects of the course, including lectures, discussions, readings, and assignments, are conducted in both Chinese and English.** This translingual and translanguaging approach aims at deepening linguistic proficiency and trains students to analyze cultural and historical phenomena from multiple perspectives. An integration of advanced language study with intercultural analysis equips students with cross-cultural competence, critical thinking skills, and the ability to engage meaningfully with global challenges. Please see “Assignment Guidelines for Language Learners and Native Speakers” below for more information.

## Learning Goals

- Analyze major cultural and artistic projects of Mao-era China in relation to their political, social, and historical contexts;
- Develop critical perspectives on how ideology shapes cultural production and how cultural works mediate collective memory and identity;
- Interpret primary sources through close reading, contextual research, and comparative analysis;
- (For language learners) Strengthen advanced-level Chinese language proficiency by developing vocabulary and stylistic awareness appropriate for cultural and historical analysis;
- Communicate complex academic ideas in accessible and engaging formats, both orally (presentations, discussions) and in writing;
- Collaborate on digital projects that contribute to public understanding of socialist culture, gaining experience with digitization, archiving, and multimedia storytelling.

## Course Policies

### Communication

If you run into challenges or something unexpected comes up, please don't hesitate to reach out. Sometimes that first step to connect can lead to a solution much quicker than expected. Feel free to email me with any questions or concerns. I normally respond to emails within 24 hours. If you don't hear from me in 48 hours, feel free to send a reminder. **Please note that I do not check the Canvas inbox as frequently or carefully as my Georgia Tech email (lliu422@gatech.edu).**

For content- and course-related questions, please use the “**Course Questions**” **discussion forum**. You may set your post to “private” if your question involves grades or other matters you would prefer to keep visible only to the instructor.

I will communicate important information to the whole class through Announcements. I will also frequently comment on your assignment submissions, especially when I need to point out issues that must be addressed immediately, such as major errors or missing components. To ensure that you receive these messages in a timely manner, please make sure your Canvas notification settings are configured properly so that conversations and comments are forwarded to your GT email. If you'd like to receive notifications through your personal email or via text, you can go to **Canvas > Account > Settings > + Email Address**

To adjust your notification settings, go to **Canvas > Account > Settings > Notifications**. Under Course Activities, turn on **“Announcements”** and **“Submission Comments.”** These two settings are especially important to stay up to date with class information and feedback. You are also encouraged to turn on other notifications as needed, such as **“Due Date.”**

## **Extension & Late Assignments**

If you encounter any situation that impedes you from completing assignments before the due dates, please don't hesitate to let me know. While I grant extensions with discretion, I fully understand that timelines can shift and things don't always go as planned.

Late submissions will receive partial credit based on how late they are:

- 90% credit if submitted within 24 hours after the deadline
- 75% credit if submitted within 72 hours
- 50% credit if submitted more than 72 hours late
- Re-submission after one week of the deadline are generally not accepted unless you have my approval.

## **Generative AI**

It is often difficult to convince students of this, but in this class, the creative and ethical use of generative AI is genuinely allowed. I hope we can explore together how humanities courses like this one might benefit from and critically expand our engagement with AI.

The fundamental premise remains: (1) You need to include a note explaining how AI was integrated into your project and how your own intellectual contribution is demonstrated in the final product. (2) All assignments must reflect your intellectual labor and originality. Your work should grow out of close reading and analysis of course materials, thoughtful research, synthesis of ideas, and the careful organization of your thoughts into coherent expression. No step in this process can be entirely outsourced to AI. In fact, overreliance on AI at any stage can significantly undermine the depth and quality of your work.

As a scholar of Chinese history, literature, and culture; a trained reader across languages; and an experienced educator in higher education, I am well-equipped to recognize work that lacks student-driven thought or relies excessively on AI. **I therefore reserve the right to assign partial or no credit to such submissions.**

Below are some suggestions for how *not* to use AI based on patterns I've observed in student work over the past few years.

### **1. Do not rely on ChatGPT to generate content or analysis because it's almost always not A-level work.**

If you ask ChatGPT to complete a writing assignment for you, say, introducing an internet slang, and then try prompting it multiple times, you'll notice that it often repeats similar ideas, perspectives, and even phrases. Many of these responses are not even that good and fall into the “predictable” category. This also means it takes a few “regenerating” for me and any other scholars in their fields to understand whether and to what extent the assignment's content draws from ChatGPT.

In the messy brilliance of human thinking, even when two people work on the same topic and draw from the same sources, we can usually still tell their voices and analyses apart.

ChatGPT also tends to recycle the same factual inaccuracies across versions--when you use it as a conversational Wikipedia, fact-checking is absolutely necessary, including searching again the people, year, and any other information you decide to include in your assignment. Sometimes it shocks me how many factual errors it can make within only 2-3 paragraphs.

**2. For similar reasons, I don't recommend using ChatGPT to "read" or summarize a piece of writing for you.**

Based on both my experience and direct conversations with ChatGPT (yes, I asked them/it), its summaries tend to be formulaic and repetitive regardless of who, when, or where it is asked to perform this task. It often focuses on the most "standard" and "correct" main thesis while omitting side arguments and nuances. Recently, I encountered more egregious mistakes where the summary was completely irrelevant, even with made-up author names and titles.

In reality, we can read the same text and walk away with entirely different impressions regarding what one finds interesting, inspiring, perplexing, or problematic. Its summary will also not take you very far because most of the inspirations or useful information we need from a piece lies outside of the "core thesis."

**3. Do not rely on ChatGPT to find sources because it does more harm than help.**

ChatGPT frequently generates fake citations that don't actually exist. You will save time and avoid serious mistakes by using trusted search tools like Google Scholar, Google Books, databases such as Project Muse and JSTOR, or even just a well-thought and deep Google search. Please note that any fake entry in your assignments will significantly impact your overall evaluation. This applies not just in college classes: in a real-world workplace, even a single incorrect data point could cause your audience to lose trust in the entire report.

ChatGPT can be useful in formatting your bibliography. I used it several times when working towards a pressing deadline, but I also noticed some mistakes about information such as first and family names, and page numbers.

**4. ChatGPT can be helpful with languages, but make sure to re-examine its results carefully.**

In my experience, ChatGPT can sometimes distort my original meaning. Also, its machine-flavor language is too easy to detect, at least for me, who has consistently used ChatGPT to help with my writing since 2023.

**5. Acknowledge your use of generative AI.**

When I was an undergraduate, citing websites felt risky. We feared professors would see it as taking shortcuts and relying on "less reliable" sources instead of academic texts. But over the past decade, citing websites has become much more normalized (with some caveats) in academic writings. I believe we are at a similar moment with generative AI; in three to five years, transparency about its use will likely become a standard and perhaps required academic and professional practice.

Another reason to acknowledge the use is very practical: grade. If you acknowledge if and how you've used it, I will communicate with you first about my suspicions and concerns before assigning a grade. But if you do not disclose such use and your work appears to rely heavily on ChatGPT, I may directly assign partial or no credit based on misrepresentation of authorship.

## **Statement on Academic Integrity**

Cheating, plagiarism, and all forms of academic dishonesty are expressly forbidden in this class, and by the university's Honor Code (<http://honor.gatech.edu/content/2/thehonor-code>). The first cheating on quizzes, tests, or exams will lead to an automatic zero for the assignment; the second cheating will immediately earn you a failing grade for the entire course. I will also pursue further disciplinary actions according to Georgia Tech's policies and procedures (see <http://honor.gatech.edu/plugins/faq/> for more information on this).

## **Resource for Students**

### **Accommodations for Disabilities**

Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the Disability Services (<http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>) to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

### **CARE Center, Counseling Center, Stamps Health Services, and the Student Center**

These uncertain times can be difficult, and many students may need help in dealing with stress and mental health. The **CARE Center** and the **Counseling Center**, and **Stamps Health Services** will offer both in-person and virtual appointments. Face-to-face appointments will require wearing a face covering and social distancing, with exceptions for medical examinations. Student Center services and operations are available on the **Student Center** website. For more information on these and other student services, contact the Vice President and Dean of Students or the **Division of Student Life**.

## Requirements and Grade Components

Grade	Description
A	Excellent 90-100
B	Good 80-89
C	Satisfactory 70-79
D	Passing 60-69
F	Failure below 60
S	Satisfactory completion of a course taken as Pass/Fail or of a course in which no other letter grade may be assigned.

### Assignment Guidelines for Language Learners and Native Speakers

This class is open to both advanced-level language learners and native speakers of Chinese. To address their respective needs and expectations, certain assignments will differ in content. The most notable difference is in the weekly reading: if a Chinese-language text is assigned, language learners will usually read selected portions and annotate the content AND the language (see “Weekly Preparation” below), while native speakers will usually read the entire piece or its majority, and focus their annotations on the content rather than the language. I will also aim to pair language learners with native speakers for the digitization project (see below). Additional adjustments and accommodations will be announced in class as needed.

### Attendance and Participation 15%

Students are expected to come to all classes on time, complete reading assignments and homework before each week’s classes, and contribute positively to class discussion.

#### *Attendance policy:*

- An accommodating attendance policy is maintained under the condition that students communicate honestly, inform the instructor beforehand, and take responsibility for making up missed content or announcements.
- Arriving more than 15 minutes late or leaving more than 15 minutes early without instructor permission will result in being marked absent.
- Three unexcused latenesses will be treated as one missed class. Three unexcused absences will automatically lower your grade from A to B or from B to C.

#### *Positive Contribution Criteria:*

- Paying attention to the instructor’s lecture; volunteering in answer the instructor’s questions and engaging in other students’ discussions; discussing in a civil and respectful manner.
- Unrelated activities during class, such as texting, doing homework for another class, or browsing will lose all participation grade of the day. Working on non-class-related tasks while occasionally raising your hand to answer questions to the discussion is not considered participation.

*Each attendance and participation accounts for 1 point.*  
*0.8-1 pts: active participation and well-prepared*  
*0.5-0.7 pts: not active participation*  
*0.1-0.4 pts: present, but rarely participate*  
*0 pt: not present*

## Weekly Preparation 25%

Weekly preparations account for the largest portion of your overall grade because meaningful and engaging class discussions require thorough preparation from both the professor and the students. **At the end of the semester, your lowest score will be dropped.** Your weekly preparation generally includes three components:

1. Complete the assigned reading or viewing on Perusall.
2. While reading, make annotations where you find the material interesting, confusing, or worth commenting on. You are encouraged to use both English and Chinese for your annotations. **Your annotations must include at least one question you would like to address in class**, either about the specific section you annotated or the overall materials. Perusall uses its own rubric to grade annotations based on the quantity and quality of your posts and how you engage with others. However, you do not need to worry about fully understanding these standards; I will review them periodically and make adjustments if needed.
3. For language learners in this class, Perusall is also a helpful platform to highlight, comment on, or ask questions about words or sentences that confuse you. When working with Chinese-language materials, whether readings, websites, or films, you should mark new words or expressions you learn. If possible, try making sentences with some words or phrases to ensure you know how to use them, though this is neither required for every annotation nor a must-do if you find the new words easy to understand and memorize.
4. Conduct a mini research activity related to the topic or to explore online primary sources. **Take notes on any interesting details or connections to the week's reading.** Not every mini-research task requires a written submission; I will let you know in advance if any written work is required. In most cases, you will be asked to share and compare your findings in class.

If you are unfamiliar with using Perusall, please watch [this video](#) (need to sign in Canvas)

Please find the components of your Perusall assignment grade below. The grade will be constantly adjusted to incorporate the quality of your mini research.

Comment content	Opening assignment	Reading, watching, or listening to the end	Active engagement time	Getting responses	Upvoting	Quizzes
The content of the comments students post, automatically scored by Perusall's quality algorithm.	Breaking up work on the assignment into multiple sittings.	Reading the entire document, watching the entire video, or listening to the entire podcast.	Time spent actively engaging with the assignment.	Writing comments that elicit responses from other students.	Writing comments that are upvoted by other students, and upvoting other students' comments.	Responding to quiz questions that are part of an assignment.
60 %	0 %	10 %	25 %	20 %	10 %	0 %
Options	Options	Options	Options	Options	Options	Options

## Presentation: 15%

Beginning in Week 4, students will work in pairs to deliver a keyword presentation. This assignment extends our readings and class discussions by offering more nuanced and critical perspectives on the weekly topic, while also translating academic ideas into clear, accessible language.

Each group will be assigned additional readings in English (usually two book chapters, about 50–60 pages uploaded to Canvas) along with a specific focus. Students are expected to:

1. Manage the presentation to be within 20 minutes, followed by a 10-minute discussion.
2. Engage with the assigned readings and integrate them organically into your presentation.
3. Conduct additional research such as facts, context, or related media and connect it to the week's topic.
4. Relate all materials to the week's broader themes (What does learning about the presentation topic can teach us about the week's theme?)
5. Prepare clear, visually engaging slides (avoid overly text-heavy slides).
6. Lead the discussion actively, encouraging participation and critical engagement.

**!! The presentation should not simply summarize the assigned readings nor provide comprehension summary!!** Instead, identify what you find most relevant and significant, weave those ideas into your analysis, and raise further questions for class discussion. I strongly recommend beginning your preparation at least one week in advance.

Criteria	Description	Weight
Analytical Clarity	Clearly introduces topic and presents well-structured analysis	30%
Integration of Sources	Thoughtfully connects readings with additional research and our discussed topic	30%
Visual Communication	Slides are organized, visually clear, and avoid excessive text	20%
Discussion Facilitation	Leads a productive post-presentation discussion; engages audience with questions	20%

## Digitalization 15%

The Mao era is often described as anti-intellectual and pseudo-scientific, especially in light of campaigns like the Great Leap Forward, whose radical industrialization led to one of the worst famines in history. More recent scholarship, however, shows that Maoist “mass science” or “grassroots science” offered alternative ways to imagine the relationship between science, society, and politics.

This assignment contributes to a collective course project: building a website called Archiving Socialist Science and Technology. Together, we will digitize and analyze popular science magazines to explore how science, as a socialist ideology, was introduced and disseminated to ordinary readers. I will provide magazines from my personal archive and more detailed instruction later in the semester.

The final report is due in the last week of the semester. Students will work in pairs, ideally consisting of one language learner and one native speaker. Each pair will choose a specific field or topic such as nuclear science, genetics, or agro-chemicals. They will select three to five articles from the magazines, digitize them, and write a report in English. The report should describe, evaluate, and analyze the science presented and explain how it was communicated to non-experts. Articles from the website the [Mao Era in Objects](#) can serve as models or inspiration.

Criteria	Description	Weight
Creativity & Analysis	Offers fresh perspective and critical reflection on chosen topic	35%
Multimedia Design	Effective use of images, videos, or interactive media; visually engaging	35%
Timeliness	Submitted by the assigned deadline	30%

### **Final Project (proposal 5%, presentation & peer review 5%, project 20%)**

Your final project concretizes what you learn throughout this semester by integrating insights into socialist culture and art with your personal intellectual interests and creative aspirations. This project invites you to critically reflect on course themes and express your understanding through a medium that resonates with you. You are encouraged to design a project that not only demonstrates your analytical and research skills but also connects to what you find personally meaningful or academically intriguing.

You have the flexibility to choose the form and media for your final project. Options include a conventional academic paper (circa 12 pages not including bibliography), a video essay, an app, a mini ethnography report, an interview/survey report, a podcast, a piece of creative writing, photography artwork, or anything approved by the instructor. The final project is scaffolded with a preliminary proposal with an annotated bibliography (Week 10), a revised, more expanded proposal (Optional, Week 12), multiple peer-review sessions, and a three-minute thesis presentation and final work submission on Thursday, Dec 4.

Criteria	Description	Weight
Originality & Critical Insight	Demonstrates personal intellectual engagement and thoughtful application of course themes	40%
Research Depth	Incorporates scholarly/primary sources meaningfully	25%
Execution & Medium	Project is well-developed in chosen format (e.g., paper, podcast, video, art)	20%
Organization & Clarity	Cohesive structure, clear language, and polished presentation	15%

Extra credits: up to 4 points TBA

## Semester Schedule

Please check the schedule regularly and carefully.  
Any change to our course arrangements will be updated here.

Class Dates	Activity or Description
<b>Week 1</b>	Course introduction Screening in class: <i>China: A Century of Revolution</i> (1949-1976)  Read and Mark “Done” for All Content in this Module  <b>Unit 1: Culture and Politics in Chinese Revolution</b>  For all: Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum of Literature and Art” (Chinese or English) Language learners: close reading of sections from the Talks, mark and annotate new words or confusing sentences Native speakers: 高华, 从「延安之春」到斗争王实味《红太阳是怎样升起的》  Mini research: identify a contemporary example that aligned with Mao’s view of art
<b>Week 2</b>	Art and Propaganda  Watch movie <i>White-Haired Girl</i> (1951) He Jingzhi, “How the White-Haired Girl Was Written and Produced” William Hinton, “Drama in the Fields”  Mini-research: find and compare re-telling of the White-Haired Girl story
<b>Week 3</b>	Case Study 1: White-Haired Girl  Jiang Qing, “On the Revolution of Peking Opera” (Chinese) Clips from traditional Peking Opera, <i>Red Lantern</i> (1970), <i>Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy</i> (1970)  Mini-research: explore the website Mao Era in Objects
<b>Week 4</b>	Case Study 2: Revolutionary Model Play  <i>Presentation 1: from The Art of Cloning, with a focus on the mechanism of cultural (re)production with revolutionary model plays.</i>  <b>Unit 2: Space and Place</b>  Ai Qing, “On Chinese Paintings” (Chinese or English) Language learners: close reading of sections from Ai Qing’s piece Native speakers: TBD Landscape paintings from the Song Dynasty and the 1950s

Mini-research: investigate into the Ming Tomb Reservoir during the Great Leap Forward

**Week 5**

Socialist Nature

*Presentation 2: from Mao's War Against Nature and People's West Lake, with a focus on the transformation of nature in the Mao era.*

Wu Hung, "Displaying the People: National Day Parades and Exhibition Architecture"  
Beijing's urban planning proposal by Liang Sicheng and Chen Zhanxiang

Mini research: compare with Liang-Chen plan with Beijing's actual urban planning

**Week 6**

Socialist City

*Presentation 3: from The Tea House Under Socialism, with a focus on the regulation and consolidation of urban life in socialist China (specifically, Chengdu)*

**Unit 3: Gender**

Watch movie: *Woman Basketball Player No. 5* (1957)

Mini research: gender representation in socialist propaganda posters on the website Chinese Posters

**Week 7**

Body Culture

*Presentation 4: from Training the Body for China and Revolutionary Bodies, with a focus on how the view of the body was shaped by modern Chinese history and how that impacted performance arts*

**Week 8**

**Intermezzo: Primary Source Exploration  
Details TBA**

Watch film, *Li Shuangshuang* (1962)  
Li Zhun, "Li Shuangshuang"

Mini research: explore the website Every Life in Mao's China

**Week 9**

Intersectionality

*Presentation 5: from Gender of Memory, with a focus on how and why rural women remembered the history differently from the state narrative, and what to do with the "divergence" (related to our next topic)*

**Unit 4: Ethics of Documentation**

Wu Hung, "A Second History: An Archive of Manipulated Photographs"  
Li Zhensheng, *Red-Color News Soldier* (in traditional Chinese or English), or photography by Henri Cartier-Bresson in China

Mini research: explore the Folk Memory Project online

**Week 10**

Photography

*Presentation 6: from Shanghai Homes and Utopian Ruins, with a focus on the use and abuse of documentary media*

Ba Jin, "The Cultural Revolution Museum"  
(short piece, please focus on your final project proposal this week)

Mini-research: explore interviews on CR/10, and Chinese websites on the Cultural Revolution

Final Project Proposal Draft

**Week 11**

Cultural Revolution Museum

**Unit 5 Post-socialism**

Readings about avant-garde arts in the 1980s, TBD  
Poems by Bei Dao, Shu Ting, Shizhi, and Gu Cheng

Mini-research: explore the website Maoist Legacies

**Week 12**

Avant-Garde Arts in the 1980s

*Presentation 7: from Like a Knife, with a focus on the relationships between revolutionary music and the 1980s yaogun/rock n' roll*

Reading & Online Discussion  
Watch film, *Piano in a Factory* (2010)

**Week 13**

Kitsch, Pop, and Nostalgia

*Presentation 8: from In the Red and Red Legacies with a focus on how the Mao era is remembered, consumed, and re-narrated in the contemporary Chinese society*

**Week 14**

Final Project Pitch & Brainstorming

Digitalization Project

Happy Thanksgiving!

