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School of Modern Languages
CHIN 3400 China: A Cultural Odyssey
TuTh 3:30-4:45, Skiles 317

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Office hour: TuTh 1:30-3 PM



Course Description

This course explores Chinese history through its vibrant popular culture—the myths, customs, media, and artistic expressions that inform daily life. Rather than treating culture as a static inheritance, we examine its dynamic and multifaceted nature, where tradition and modernity intersect, contest, and reimagine each other. From timeless stories like *Journey to the West* to contemporary internet phenomena, these cultural forms reveal not only the values and tensions within Chinese society but also its broader global entanglements. Students will engage

with these topics to uncover how popular culture evolves as a site of resistance, adaptation, and creativity.

The course's interdisciplinary approach combines cultural and historical analysis with critical engagement with primary sources, including films, music, literature, and visual arts. By examining themes such as religion, gender, revolution, and urbanization, students will investigate the ways in which cultural artifacts both mirror and shape collective memory, identity, and sociopolitical change. Through class discussions, collaborative presentations, and creative projects, students will develop analytical tools to assess cultural production as a relational process that connects aesthetics, ethics, and lived realities. By the end of the semester, participants will be encouraged to think critically about their own positions in relation to the global flows of culture and ideas that shape the modern world.

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Humanities area.
Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.
This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts or of works in the visual/performing arts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Intercultural Competence

Learning Goals

- Become familiar with major aspects of Chinese culture and important events, themes, and concerns in modern Chinese history;
- Engage with literary, historical, sociopolitical, and theoretical readings of primary and secondary sources;
- Recognize and evaluate culture as a dynamic set of relationships;
- Demonstrate critical thinking abilities, supported by question-centered inquiry and discussion;
- Improve written and oral communication in the form of presentation, analytical writing, and a creative final project

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.

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 <u>not</u> 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 Reflection 25%

Each week, you will have readings to complete before class. Weekly reflection assignments give you an opportunity to raise questions, share your thoughts, and engage with your classmates' perspectives, all of which constitute an important part of our class discussions.

There are three types of weekly reflections. You will complete only ONE type each week, and I will let you know at least two weeks in advance which type of reflection you are expected to complete.

(1) Perusall for readings that require close reading and analysis

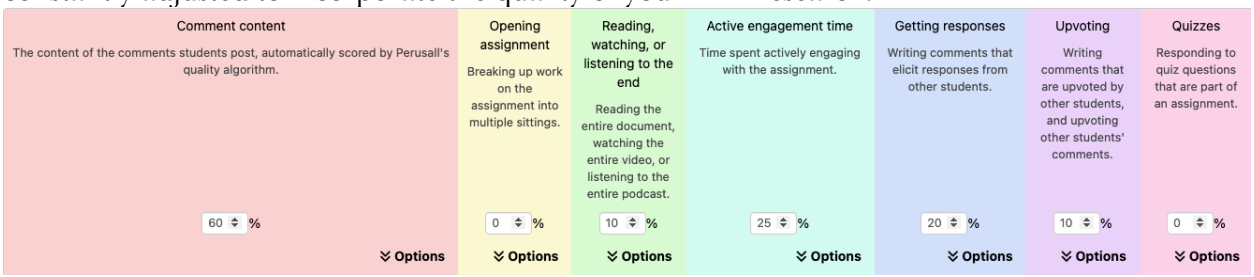
While reading, make annotations where you find the material interesting, confusing, or worth commenting on. **Your annotations must include at least one question you would like to address in class**, either about the specific section you annotated or the overall materials.

The deadline for each Perusall reading assignment corresponds with the module's deadline. Students should complete the readings two days before the day of teaching (for instance, by the end of Sunday if the readings are for Tuesday, and by the end of Tuesday if the readings are for Thursday). Please note that Perusall reading assignments cannot be made up after one week past the due date unless students have asked me for extension.

Perusall will automatically grade your posts based on quantity, quality, and engagement with others. However, please don't worry about the automatic grading. I will regularly check and override the system's decision if needed.

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.



(2) Convention Discussion Posts

For convention discussion posts, students are required to complete the assigned readings and the weekly post by Sunday of the week. Your response should be concise, no more than 200 words. Rather than summarizing the readings, please focus on articulating *your* thoughts, confusions, inspirations, surprises, or what *you* find intriguing and worth intellectual analysis. You can, for instance, reflect on how these ideas provide new insights into the topic, historical context, or work being examined this week. Conclude your post with 1–2 questions you would like to discuss further in class. After submitting your post, spend 10-20 minutes reading your peers' responses and provide thoughtful comments on two posts.

Criteria	Description	Weight
Analytical Depth	Goes beyond summary to offer interpretation, critique, or thoughtful engagement with readings	50%
Timeliness	Post is submitted by the weekly deadline (Sunday)	25%
Peer Interaction	Offers respectful, insightful replies to two classmates' posts	25%

(3) Post-class reflection

For a post-class reflection, you still need to complete the assigned readings before class, but you do not need to submit anything beforehand. Instead, after class, you will write a short reflection of fewer than 250 words responding to what was discussed in class. You may extend a point that you feel was not sufficiently addressed, disagree with or complicate something from the lecture or discussion, and/or identify something that was missing but that you think is worth discussing. As with the conventional pre-class posts, conclude your reflection with 1–2 questions that you would like to discuss further.

Criteria	Description	Weight
Analytical Depth	Goes beyond summary to offer interpretation, critique, or thoughtful engagement with readings	50%
Timeliness	Post is submitted by the weekly deadline (Sunday)	25%
Peer Interaction	Offers respectful, insightful replies to two classmates' posts	25%

Presentation Part 1: Teamwork 15%

Starting in Week 5, students will collaborate with one or two classmates to deliver a keyword group presentation. The presentation should be 20 minutes long, followed by a 10-minute discussion session.

Expectations for presenters include: (1) Engage with recommended materials (approximately 50–60 pages, uploaded to Canvas) and integrate them meaningfully into your presentation; (2) Conduct additional research by gathering supplementary facts, information, or related media; (3) Create clear, visually engaging slides that avoid too many text; (4) Actively lead the discussion, encouraging participation and critical engagement. I recommend preparing for the presentation at least one week ahead of time.

Criteria	Description	Weight
Analytical Clarity	Clearly introduces topic, presents well-structured analysis, and organize presentation sections in an orderly and logical way	20%
Integration of Sources	Thoughtfully connects required readings with additional research	20%
Independent Research	Searches for materials, histories, and contexts beyond the readings	20%
Effective Communication	Slides are organized, visually clear, and avoid excessive text	20%
Discussion Facilitation	Leads a productive post-presentation discussion; engages audience with questions	20%

Presentation Part 2: Individual Report 15%

After completing the group presentation, each presenter is required to submit an individual report within one week. This report should be 1,300-1,500 words and serve as an extension of the presentation.

Engage specifically with at least one of the assigned readings;

You should look for at least one other source, preferentially academic (do that when you are preparing for the presentation);

Your report is based on

While the presentation is designed for an audience with little to no prior knowledge of the topic and should focus on introducing its background, emergence, and importance, the report is addressed to me who is already familiar with the subject. Therefore, the purpose of the report is to present your personal insights and analytical reflections on the topic, rather than a summary of what has already been presented. In your report, ignore all the introductory or informational writings and cut to the chase. You can, for instance, explore aspects of the topic that you found intriguing but were unable to include in the presentation. You can also consider whether there are meaningful comparisons between elements of the theme and other related topics that could provide new perspectives. You can also critically assess the recommended readings if they leave certain questions unanswered or overlook important viewpoints. The report is an opportunity to showcase your ability to think critically and independently.

Criteria	Description	Weight
Critical Thinking	Shows originality in reflection and analysis	30%
Engagement with Sources	Uses readings judiciously and critically (not descriptively), look for external sources if necessary	25%
Depth of Analysis	Avoids vague or general claims; supports insights with examples or comparison	25%
Writing Quality	Writing is clear, logically structured, carefully edited, with your own authorial tone	20%

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

Your final project concretizes what you learn throughout this semester by integrating insights into Chinese culture and society 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 10 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 (October 27), a revised, more expanded proposal (optional), multiple peer-review sessions, and a three-minute thesis presentation and final work submission on December 15. You can check some of past students' final projects here.

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. Assignments marked in red are due for the whole class, and those in black are only due for the presenters.

Class Dates	Activity and Description	Assignments Due
	Introduction & Movie watching: ***Hero* (Dir. Yimou Zhang, 2002)** Read and Mark "Done" for All Content in this Module Reading & Weekly Discussion: Selections from the *Analects*, *Daodejing*, and *Zhuangzi* **Cultural Foundations: Confucianism and Daoism** Reading & Weekly Discussion: Edward Yang, "Dish, Rice or Noodle? The Changing Use of Chopsticks." Thomas Talhelm, "The Rice Theory of Culture" Haiming Liu, "General Tso's Chicken Made in Taiwan" **Food Culture** Reading & Weekly Discussion: Selections from *Monkey* by Wu Ch'eng-en, translated by Arthur Waley **Mythology I** Reading & Weekly Discussion Cont. with *Monkey* *Group Presentation 1: Nezha* *Meir Shahar, "Indian Mythology and the Chinese Imagination: Nezha, Nalakubara, and Krsna"* *Chengcheng You, "The Demon Child and His Modern Fate: Reconstructing the Nezha Myth in Animated Fabulation"* **Mythology II** *Group Presentation 2: White Snake* *Liang Luo, "Introduction to White Snake Legends," "The Global White Snake as Digital Activist Project"* *https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_59xhjhmh/171192221* Nezha individual report due Reading & Weekly Discussion: Ruchard Barnhart, "Figure in Landscape" Steven Little and Shawn Eichman, "The Sacred Landscape" **Art of Literati** *Group Presentation 3 (September 23): Calligraphy/书法 shufa*	

Kwo Da-Wei, "Flourishing Period," "Aesthetic Roots," "Aesthetic Components"

Group Presentation 4 (September 25): Peking Opera/京剧 Jingju
Ruru Li, "Singing, Speaking, Dance-acting, and Combat; Mouth, Hands, Eyes, Body, and Steps – From Training to Performance in Beijing Opera (Jingju)."
Joshua Goldstein, "Mei Lanfang and the Nationalization of the Peking Opera, 1912-1930"

White Snake Individual Report

Preparation:
Mahjong rules & practice

No class; Fall Break

Game and Play
Mahjong Day

Calligraphy & Peking Opera Individual Report

Reading & Weekly Discussion:
Susan Mann, Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History, Chapters 2-3
"Mulan's Balad"

Landscape painting workshop

Gender

Presentation 5: footbinding/缠足 chanzu
Dorothy Ko, Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet (selections), "Cinderella's Dreams."

Movie Watching:
Wu Yonggang, *The Goddess* (1934, screening in class)

Reading & Online Discussion:
Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yan'an Forum of Art and Literature"
Jiang Qing, "On the Revolution in Peking Opera";
Watch excerpts from *Red Detachment of Women* (1972)

Footbinding Individual Report

Revolutionary Culture

Presentation 6: yangge/秧歌 (folk dancing)
Hung Chang-tai: "Yangge: Dance of Revolution"
Rose Martin and Ruohan Chen, "From Folk to on Mass Dance: The Emergence of Guangchang Wu"

Final Project Proposal Draft

Cultural Revolution

Yangge Individual Report

Student selection of one chapter form Xueping Zhong, Zheng Wang, and Bai Di, *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era.*
Interviews from CR/10

Cultural Revolution Museum
Movie watching: *Though I Am Gone* (Hu Jie, 2006)

Presentation 7: sent-down youth or educated youth/知青 zhiqing
Emily Honig and Xiaojian Zhao, "Sent-down Youth and Rural Economic Development in Maoist China"
Michel Bonnin, "Restricted, Distorted but Alive: The Memory of the "Lost Generation" of Chinese Educated Youth"

Reading, Listening, and Online Discussion
Selected songs by Teresa Teng, Cui Jian, and Jay Chou
Andrew Jones, "The Politics of Popular Music in Post-Tiananmen China"
Wei-Hsin Lin, "Jay Chou's Music and the Shaping of Popular Culture in China"

Music

Presentation 8: Chinese Hip Hop/说唱 shuochang
Jin Liu, "Language, identity and unintelligibility: A case study of the rap group Higher Brothers"
Michael Ka Chi Cheuk, "The Politics and Aesthetics of Featuring in Post-2017 Chinese Hip Hop,"

Sent-down Youths Individual Report

Reading & Online Discussion
Hao Jingfang, *Folding Beijing*

Urban Culture

Presentation 9: urban villages/城中村 chengzhongcun
Buckingham, W. and Chan, K. W. "One City, Two Systems: Chengzhongcun in China's Urban System."
Tzu-Chi Ou, "Low-End Accumulation: Spatial Transformation and Social Stratification in a Beijing Urban Village"

Chinese Hip Hop Individual Report

No class; work on final project

Happy Thanksgiving!

Urban Villages Individual Report

Reading & Online Discussion:
Ban Wang, "Dignity of Labor"
Jennifer Hubbert, "On Nostalgia and Returns"

Nostalgia
Movie watching: *Piano in a Factory* (Zhang Meng, 2010)

Presentation 10: Li Ziqi/李子柒 (Chinese Internet Celebrity)

Tao Qian, "The Peach Blossom Spring."
Dai, Wangyun. "How Li Ziqi Repackages Rural China for Urban Fantasies"
Limin Liang, "Consuming the Pastoral Desire: Li Ziqi, Food Vlogging and the Structure of Feeling in the Era of Microcelebrity"

No class. Work on Final Project

Li Ziqi Individual Report

Three-minute Thesis Presentation & Final Project due