ML 2500: US-China Intercultural Communication
Spring 2026 Syllabus

Class hours: TR 5:00 pm - 6:15 pm Classroom: Swann 320
Instructor: Dr. Jin Liu (Liú Lǎoshī) Email: jin.liu@modlangs.gatech.edu
Office: Swann 312; Office hours: 11-noon Fridays (held on Zoom) and by appointment

Core IMPACTS Statement

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 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 and 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, and intercultural competence.

Course Description

The course is designed to equip students with strong intercultural communication and critical thinking skills in business, economics, politics, international relations, education, media, etc., in an increasingly globalized world. The course begins with an introduction to key concepts in Chinese culture, philosophy, and thoughts. In particular, students will read and discuss the passages from *Analects* and *Daodejing*. It then moves on to discuss Sino-U.S. intercultural communication in modern history, focusing on the shared history of the Chinese and American people in education and culture. Next, it examines case studies in contemporary popular culture, academic exchange, and business industry, in particular in terms of cross-cultural conflict, misunderstanding, and appropriation. Finally, students apply the theoretical and cultural concepts they have learned from this course and conduct research with enhanced intercultural sensibility, a comparative perspective, and an open mind.

You are responsible for devoting 1-2 hours of study outside of class for each hour in class.

Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the Georgia Tech Academic Honor Code (https://policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-affairs/academic-honor-code) will be reported, per the policy, and **a minimum sanction of a zero score for the assignments and essays will be imposed**.

For any assignment (homework, presentation, and unit essay, etc.), when you use someone else's words, ideas, or research, **you should credit them properly. This includes use of ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE of any kind.**

Learning Objectives

The overall goal is to raise students' cultural and intercultural competence in an integrated way. Specifically, upon successful completion of the required coursework, students are expected to achieve a higher *cultural competence* by learning key concepts and notions in traditional Chinese thoughts and philosophy, the DNA of the Chinese culture, and *intercultural competence* through subject learning.

Course Materials

This course will be conducted in the forms of discussions, guided readings, writings, presentations, and projects. Materials for the course consist of readings in English, PowerPoints, websites, films, and video clips.

Required readings will be uploaded on the Canvas. Here are the full citations of the books and articles:

Dong, Lan. 2011. *Mulan's Legend and Legacy in China and the United States*. Temple University Press.

Lai, K. L. 2008. Chapter 2 "Confucius and the Confucian Concepts Ren and Li," in *An Introduction of Chinese Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 19-34.

Lai, K. L. 2008. Chapter 3 "The Cultivation of Humanity in Confucian Philosophy: Mencius and Xunzi," in *An Introduction of Chinese Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 35-54.

Lai, K. L. 2008. Chapter 5 "Early Daoist Philosophy: The Dao De Jing as a Metaphysical Treatise," in *An Introduction of Chinese Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 71-92.

Lai, K. L. 2008. Chapter 6 "Early Daoist Philosophy: Dao, Language and Society," in *An Introduction of Chinese Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 93-110.

Murray, Jeremy, Perry Link, and Paul G. Pickowicz (eds), 2019. *China Tripping: Encountering the Everyday in the People's Republic*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Xu, Guoqi. 2014. *Chinese and Americans: A Shared History*. Harvard University.

Grading

1. Attendance and Class Participation/Discussion (10%)

1) Arrival more than 10 minutes late or leave more than 10 minutes early (without permission of the instructor) will result in being marked late/early. If you must leave the class early please notify the instructor before the start of the class.
2) Each **three lateness** will be treated the same as one missed class. **Three unexcused absences** will automatically lower one level of your grade.
3) You are expected to actively participate in the class discussions, teamwork, and other class activities. No or little participation of discussion will strongly affect your participation grade.
4) If for any reason the instructor is late you will be required to wait ½ hour before you can assume the class will not be held and you are free to leave.

2. Reading Homework (36%, 12x3points)

Reading guide and questions for each paper will be posted, and you are required to complete all the homework assignments and be well prepared for class participation and discussion. Each homework is due one day before the class covers it. Grading will be based on the quality of your work. An excellent response is not only accurate, but also demonstrates thoughtful reading of the papers.

Grading: close reading and accuracy (70%), arguments and critical thinking (20%), timely submission (10%)

3. Unit Review Essay and Presentation (30%, 3x10 points)

You're required to go over each unit's content and write a unit review essay. 3 units in total. Each essay about 3 pages, double spaced.

Besides the summary of what you have learned in this unit, I am interested in YOUR thoughts on issues discussed in the papers, asking interesting, challenging questions about the author's argument and analysis, integrating the class discussions and student presentations, relating the articles to issues we have discussed earlier, applying what you have read or learned from the class to relevant examples and phenomena from your own experiences.

Grading: close reading (30%), arguments and critical thinking (30%), length and content (20%), timely submission (10%), oral presentation (10%).

3. Group Projects (4x2=8 points)

You will work on two group projects; one is on the Chinese animation blockbuster *Ne Zha* (2019) and the other on the US.-China AI competition.

4. Topic Presentation and Discussion Leader (6 points)

Each student will have an opportunity to do a lesson presentation on a suggested topic, as well as leading class discussion on that topic.

5. Final Project and presentation (10%)

This should be academic research that shows intercultural analysis, solid research, and critical thinking. Recent topics such as China Maxxing, the global success of Labubu, Nezha phenomenon and the EV Neta, 996 culture and "Anti-involution" movement, etc.

Grading: Research, methodology, data (60%), Arguments and Critical Thinking (15%), Organization and Structure (5%), accuracy of language use (10%), and oral presentation (10%).

Ga. Tech Scale: 100—90 A; 89—80 B; 79—70 C; 69—60 D; 59—0 F.

Note: Final grades reflect both the quality of completed work and the student's progress over time. Consistent effort and measurable improvement throughout the semester will positively contribute to the final evaluation.

Minimum grade for "pass" if taking this class pass/fail is 70 (C). Both syllabus and schedule are subject to change.

SCHEDULE

The following is a tentative schedule. It may change as we proceed throughout the semester.

Week	Date	Content	Readings and Due Dates
Part I. The DNA of Chinese Culture			
1	1/12	Course introduction	
	1/14	Film screening: *Shower*	
2	1/19	Confucianism: *Analect*	Lai (2008): chapter 2
	1/21	Confucianism: *Analect*	Lai (2008): chapter 3
3	1/26	Daoism: *Daodejing*	Lai (2008): chapter 5
	1/28	Daoism: *Daodejing*	
4	2/2	Daoism: language and *wuwei*	Lai (2008): chapter 6
	2/4	Daoism: language and *wuwei*	
5	2/9	A workshop on *ba-duan-jin* (Eight-Section health exercise) and Taichi basics	
	2/11	Unit review essay and presentation	
Part II. U.S.-China Cultural Communication in History			
6	2/16	"The Surprising Shared History of Chinese and Americans"	Xu (2014): Introduction
	2/18	"The Chinese Education Mission"	Xu (2014): chapter 2
7	2/23	"John Dewey: A Yankee Confucius and Cultural Ambassador"	Xu (2014): chapter 5

	2/25	"Shared Diplomatic Journey through Sports"	Xu (2014): chapter 6
Part III. Cross-Cultural Communication and Misunderstanding			
8	3/2	Unit review essay and presentation	
	3/4	"Ballad of Mulan" and Disney's *Mulan* (1998)	Dong Lan (2011) 51-61; 163-186
9	3/9	Spring Break!	
	3/11	Spring Break!	
10	3/16	"Military Women and Lady Knights-Errant in Ancient China"	Dong Lan (2011) 9-50
	3/18	Group project on *Nezha 1* (2019)	
11	3/23	Group project presentation	
	3/25	*China Tripping*	Murray et al. (2019)
12	3/30	*China Tripping*	Murray et al. (2019)
	4/1	Film screening: *American Factory* (2019)	Netflix
13	4/6	Discussion on the film	
	4/8	Unit review essay and presentation	
Part IV. Student Research			
14	4/13	Group research: Discussion on *Culpability* (2025) by Bruce Holsinger and self-driving cars	
	4/15	Group research: AI Competition between China and U.S.	
15	4/20	Individual research	
	4/22	Individual research	
16	4/27	Final presentation	
	4/29	Final Presentation 6:00 PM - 8:50 PM	