CORE UA-700 EXPRESSIVE CULTURE
Chinese Art Through Western Encounters
Professor Hsueh-man Shen    MW9:30-10:45am. Synchronous, remote.
Recitation Instructor: Wei Zhao   F8-9:15, and F9:30-10:45am. Remote.
Recitation Instructor: Saarthak Singh   F9:30-10:45 and 11am-12:15pm. Remote.

Course Description

Titled "Chinese Art through Western Encounters," this Core Curriculum course addresses the broader implications of trade, travel, war, and faith on the visual and material cultures of China. It examines a wide variety of materials, ranging from shipwrecks in the Indian Ocean, Buddhist manuscripts from the Silk Road, export porcelain manufactured in South China, to cultural relics 'lost' to colonial powers, and the principles and practices of building conservation developed as a result of China’s encounters with the West.

This course assumes no prior knowledge of the material. Through China and its connections we focus on how to look closely at works of art, how to describe them, and how to articulate and then investigate questions they pose. What accounts for changes in art? In what contexts do changes occur? How do contacts with the outside world inform the ways in which Chinese works of art look? How “Chinese” are those artworks then if their contents change over time and in response to encounters with others? What constitutes the “Chineseness” of a given artwork? This course offers students an opportunity to study objects and sites from a range of historical periods, set in their own time and original contexts, to understand how they responded to the contacts, connections, and exchanges that conditioned artistic production. We will also consider the ways in which those encounters gave rise to not just innovative works but a constantly evolving conception of “Chinese art,” a process that continues into our time. Along the way, we will see that values and principles sometimes clash in areas like copies, cultural ownership, and conservation, and an innovative way to resolve differences becomes necessary.

Beyond these historical and conceptual issues, the course will encourage students to think critically and to communicate in a clear and effective manner through writing and reading assignments as well as through dialogue in small sections.

Course Requirements

Class and weekly discussion sections attendance. Students may be excused for documented medical or personal emergency and will receive reasonable accommodation for the observance of religious holidays. In these cases, they should contact their instructors in advance or, in cases of emergency, as soon as is practicable. Students are responsible for making up any material or assignments
they miss.

**Reading all assigned texts.**

**Completion of all class writing assignments:** Students are expected to submit course work on time and to retain copies of their work until a final grade has been received for the course. Submit all assignments electronically to the NYU Classes website. Instructors are not obliged to accept late work, and lateness of work will affect the holistic assessment of class participation.

**Taking mid-term and final exams.** The in-class mid-term exam will last 75 minutes and the final exam will last 110 minutes.

Students who encounter sudden and incapacitating illness or another comparably grave circumstance that prevents them from completing the final examination or assignment in a course may request a temporary mark of Incomplete from the course instructor. To receive an Incomplete, students must have completed all other requirements for the course, including satisfactory attendance, and there must be a strong likelihood they will pass the course when all work is completed.

**Grading**

Five writing assignments: 40% (8% each)
Class and recitation attendance and participation: 20%
Mid-term exam: 20%
Final exam: 20%

**Session Decorum**

The classroom is a space for free and open inquiry and for the critical evaluation of ideas, and it should be free of personal prejudice. Students and instructors alike have an obligation to all members of the class to create an educational atmosphere of mutual trust and respect in which differences of opinion can be subjected to deliberate and reasonable examination without animus.

As a matter of courtesy to their fellow students and instructors, students should arrive at class promptly, prepared and ready to participate. Students are reminded particularly to switch off cellphones and, except in cases of emergency, to remain in the classroom for the duration of the lecture or section meeting. If it is necessary to leave or enter a room once class has begun, students should do so quietly and with as little disruption as possible. Under University policy, disruptive classroom behavior may be subject to faculty review and disciplinary sanction.
**Plagiarism** is using the ideas, data, or language of another without appropriate acknowledgment. If you present someone's words, thoughts, or data as your own, you are committing plagiarism. The location of the information is irrelevant: when it comes to plagiarism, information from the Internet is equivalent to information from a printed book or journal. To avoid plagiarism you must cite your source every time you:

- Use an author’s exact written or spoken words. In this case, you must also identify the words by enclosing them with quotation marks or indenting the quote on both sides of the margin.
- Paraphrase someone's written or spoken words.
- Use facts provided by someone else that are not common knowledge.
- Make significant use of someone's ideas or theories.

If you have doubts about any of the above points, or are wondering about related points, err on the side of caution: cite your source. Note that it is also plagiarism to pay a person or Internet service for a paper, or hand in someone else's paper as your own.

**Cheating:** It is a violation of NYU’s standard for academic integrity and considered cheating to submit the same or substantially similar work in multiple courses, either in the same semester or in a different semester, without the express approval of all instructors.

### Class Schedule

**M 2/1 Introduction**

**PART I: BEFORE THE ERA OF THE “SILK ROAD”**

**W 2/3 Early Contacts: Materiality and Motifs**

**M 2/8 Terracotta Warriors as Evidence of Hellenistic Art in China?**

**PART II: CONTACT ZONES**

**W 2/10 On the Edge: Caucasian Mummies at China’s Frontiers**

F 2/12 Assignment #1 due at 8am EST

M 2/15 Presidents’ Day. No teaching.

W 2/17 The “Silk Road”: An Interlinked Network of Trade Routes

M 2/22 In the Temple: The Foreign Origin and the Many “Faces” of the Buddha

W 2/24 In the Temple: Religious Diversity at the Mogao Grottoes

M 3/1 In the Temple: Mongols and Mosques

W 3/3 In the Tomb: Sogdian Merchants and Their Descendants in China

F 3/5 Assignment #2 due at 8am EST

M 3/8 In the Tomb: Khitan Nomads and the Steppe Traditions
• Kinoshita, Hiromi. “Hybridity and Conquest: Patterns of Liao (AD 907-1125) Khitan Tomb Burial.” In Cultural Interaction and Conflict in Central and Inner

W 3/10 Sacred Burials of Buddha Relics: Building a Tomb for the Buddha?

M 3/15 In the Marketplace: the Hejiacun Hoard and More

W 3/17 Mid-term exam (75 minutes).

M 3/22 On the Boat: The Belitung Shipwreck, A Chinese Cargo on an Arab Ship


F 3/26 Assignment #3 due at 8am EST

M 3/29 At the Port: China-Africa Encounters in the Swahili Coast

W 3/31 At the Port: Shanghai Modern
M 4/5 At Court: Art Production and Imperial Collection of the Qing Court

W 4/7 At Court: Portrait Photos for Monarchs

M 4/12 In the Museum: World’s Fairs – Where the East Meets the West

PART III: ADAPTATION, APPROPRIATION, AND AMALGAMATION
W 4/14 Pots with Words: Interpretation of Inscriptions & Intentions

F 4/16 Assignment #4 due at 8am EST

M 4/19 Spring Break. No teaching.

W 4/21 Imaginations of Death and the Beyond

M 4/26 Buddha with a Cross

W 4/28 Strange Beasts & Their Images

F 4/30 Assignment #5 due at 8am EST
M 5/3 Chinoiserie: A Matter of Taste or Perspective?

PART IV: CLASHES, CONTROVERSIES, AND COMPROMISE

W 5/5 Copying with Good Intention? Dafen Oil Painting Village

M 5/10 Is Authenticity an Absolute or a Relative Matter? Building Conservation in the East and the West

W 5/12 Final exam (110 minutes).

Assignments

Assignment #1: Close Looking and Description (800 words, due Friday 2/12 at 8am EST)
Choose one of the listed four objects in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and make a drawing of the work, using any drawing instrument you prefer. In 800 words, write a description of the work that includes some considerations of how it relates to the exchanges between China and the outside world. Include as much detail as possible, taking into consideration not only the subject of the image but its appearance (for instance, what material it is made of, how the object’s surface interacts with the light source, how the motifs are distributed across the surface, what the brushwork is like, the angle at which the object is supposed to be looked at, whether the object is intended to be part of a group). What is the significance of the object? Is it specific to the object or common to other objects, too? Be as specific as possible. For this assignment you should both go to the Metropolitan Museum to study the object and consult the images of it available on the Museum’s website. Submit the assignment electronically, together with a selfie taken in front of the object, to the NYU Classes website. You will not be graded on the quality of your drawing; you only need to have done it.
- *Belt hook with dragons*. 2nd century B.C. Accession No. 2002.201.170
- *Buddha*. 5th–6th century. Accession No. 29.19
• **Length of Painted Silk.** Mid-18th century. Accession No. 2013.599

*Skills to practice: slow looking, drawing, and description.*

**Assignment #2: Critical Analysis (800 words, due Friday 3/5 at 8am EST)**
In 800 words write an essay analyzing the argument in the assigned reading for this week (Cheng 2010). Here are some of the questions you should be asking yourself, while completing this assignment: What is the argument? What is the structure of the argument? Why is it constructed this particular way? Is the argument logically coherent? What are the underlying assumptions? Has the author made these assumptions clear or not? Is the order (sequence) in which the author introduces information effective for the argument? Has the author presented enough evidence to make the case? Has the author used rhetoric anywhere to paper over a logical leap? Has the author addressed potential objections? Could the article have been edited to make it more effective? Submit the paper electronically to your recitation instructor.

*Skills to practice: critical thinking and analytical reading*

**Assignment #3: Fieldwork (5 photos and a 1,000-word essay, due Friday 3/26 at 8am EST). NB. This assignment is subject to adjustment.**
Using any sort of camera to take 5 photographs of the Mahayana Temple (133 Canal St.) in New York City’s Chinatown. You should spend time walking in and around the temple documenting what would be the most compelling examples of East-West encounters discussed in class. Look not only at icons and ritual implements, but also the interior decoration, architecture, location and surroundings of the temple. Take note of any religious music, chanting, or distinct smell from the use of things like incense or flowers. Pay special attention to how the Mahayana Temple compares to temples in China, and how it adapts to the environment of NYC Chinatown. Then write a 1,000-word essay describing your discoveries and experience of the space.

*Skills to practice: collecting, documenting, and processing raw research material*

**Assignment #4: Visual Analysis and Critical Thinking (1,000 words, due Friday 4/16 at 8am EST)**
Write a 1,000-word essay about a work of art from those listed for Assignment #1. Your essay should contain a clear thesis about appropriation and amalgamation that is substantiated by visual analysis and research using at least five sources. It should consider the object in its historical context of contact and address matters pertaining to objects, people, and ideas in motion. It should also consider how the work’s exhibition in a museum informs its possible meaning (i.e. where it is hung on the wall, how it is lit, what other images or objects are nearby). How does its existence in a museum alter your perception of the object as a work of art? Your essay should contain footnotes, a bibliography, and at least three illustrations.

*Skills to practice: independent research, argumentation, academic writing.*

**Assignment 5: Application of Interpretive Method (1,200 words, due Friday 4/30 at 8am EST)**
You are a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and you are organizing a small exhibition, titled “Encounters,” to feature Chinese art within the context of
East/West cultural exchange. Choose 3-5 artworks from the Met’s collection for inclusion in your exhibition, and justify your choice by describing the aspects of the work that make it suitable for the theme. Elaborate on how they illuminate each other, the mode of exchange they represented, and the artistic expressions they gave rise to or engaged with. Use both visual analysis of the works themselves as well as information drawn from the museum’s archives and secondary literature. Use the skills you have learned from the lectures, recitations, and assigned readings.

*Skills to practice: application of learned skills to a practical project*