CET Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Shanghai
Course Code / Title: SH/ARTH 330 Chinese Art and Visual Culture
Contact Hours: 45
Recommended Credits: 3
Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Art History / East Asian Studies, History, Cultural Studies
Language of Instruction: English
Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description

This course examines Chinese art and visual culture from the origins of Chinese civilization to the present, and the impact of cultural heritage, artistic exchange, and modernization on its production and reception. In addition to providing students with the tools to identify, understand, and interpret major works of Chinese art, the course explores key concepts, including the relationship of art to calligraphy, ritual and funerary traditions, literati culture, garden design, Dunhuang Buddhist practices, ceramics, and the transformation of Chinese art in the modern and contemporary periods. Students also consider the role of the museum, the art market, intangible cultural heritage, and cross-cultural exchange in shaping the field today. The course combines lectures, seminar discussions, and on-site visits to museums, galleries, and historic sites in Shanghai and the surrounding areas.

Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students will:

- Identify Chinese artwork, using appropriate art historical vocabulary.
- Analyze the formal qualities of Chinese artworks.
- Critically analyze the social, political, historical, philosophical, and religious contexts that inform Chinese art.
- Understand the challenges, benefits, and social implications of different artistic media.
- Strengthen and improve critical research, writing, and oral presentation skills.
- Appreciate and respect cultural diversity as expressed through art.

Requirements

Class attendance and active engagement are mandatory for all sessions, including 6-8 on-site field study classes. All attendance regulations strictly follow the CET Academic Attendance Policy. Students must complete assigned readings before class, participate regularly in discussions, and engage thoughtfully during site visits. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

- **Participation and field study engagement:** Evaluated for each class session. During seminar discussions and on-site visits, students should demonstrate comprehension of assigned readings, thoughtful visual analysis of artworks, original observations, and pose

questions that deepen collective understanding of core course themes. Passive physical attendance does not count toward this grade.

- **Field reflection papers:** Students will choose three field study classes from the course to write short reflection papers. For each paper, students will describe their firsthand observation of one artwork encountered during the site visit including its visual qualities, materials and fine details. They will discuss the work using course concepts and relevant historical context, and compare differences between images of the artwork in printed sources and the physical object seen in person. Each reflection paper should be approximately 500 words and cite at least two references.

- **Individual presentation:** Students should select one of their three short reflection papers as the topic for a 10-minute presentation. The talk should build upon their observation and analysis from the reflection paper. Images of artworks may be used to support the argument. Students will briefly present their ideas and respond to questions from classmates and the instructor.

- **Research paper:** Students will complete a final research paper (1,500-2,000 words) on a self-chosen topic. The analysis must incorporate at least one artwork viewed in person on course field studies, backed by academic sources. Example topics include: garden design, ceramics, Dunhuang imagery, propaganda posters, calligraphy, and contemporary Chinese art. Additional assignment components include a topic proposal and preliminary bibliography, and an individual 10-minute oral presentation on the written paper.

Grading
The final grade is determined as follows:

Participation and field study engagement *(see rubric below)* 20%
Field reflection papers (3 at 10%) 30%
Individual presentation 10%
Research paper 40%
- Topic proposal and bibliography: 10%
- Written paper: 20%
- Presentation: 10%

Participation and Field Study Grading Rubric

Grade	Class Discussion	Reading / Pre-Visit Preparation	Field Study Engagement
A	Excellent: Consistently contributes voluntarily; offers original visual analysis and	Fully completes all readings and pre-visit work. Draws on	Actively conducts close onsite observation; compares physical

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Grade	Class Discussion	Reading / Pre-Visit Preparation	Field Study Engagement
	critical perspectives on artworks; connects object observations, assigned readings and core course themes; respects peers and does not dominate discussion.	art-historical frameworks to deepen class dialogue and advance group discussion.	objects with reproduced images; participates in onsite conversations and follows site regulations.
B	Good: Regularly joins class discussion. Contributions are thoughtful and link artworks, readings and course topics, supporting collective class learning.	Completes most readings and pre-visit assignments. Occasionally offers valuable analysis and connections drawn from course materials.	Observes exhibits attentively and takes part in onsite exchanges; notices differences between objects and reproductions; collaborates well within the group.
C	Satisfactory / Needs Improvement: Contributions are sporadic. Remarks tend toward general statements without concrete artwork analysis; may go off-topic and add limited value to discussion.	Completes only partial readings and pre-visit tasks; shows little evidence of analytical thinking.	Mostly passive within the group; rarely offers independent observation or comments on exhibits.
D	Poor: Rarely speaks up. Comments mostly restate texts or peers' ideas with little independent analysis; remarks are disconnected from course and object-based topics.	Minimal completion of readings and pre-visit preparation; cannot draw upon course materials for discussion.	Pays little attention to onsite artworks; almost no onsite engagement and appears distracted.
F	Failing: Absences or total lack of in-class engagement; distracted behaviors such as phone-use and unrelated online activity.	No completed readings or pre-visit preparation.	Unexcused absence from field study, or disruptive, disengaged behavior during site visits.

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Readings / Resources

Cahill, James. “Ren Xiong and His Self-Portrait.” Ars Orientalis 25 (1995): 119–132.

Clunas, Craig. *Art in China.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Clunas, Craig. Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China. London: Reaktion Books, 1996.

Erickson, Britta. “The Reception in the West of Experimental Mainland Chinese Art of the 1990s.” In Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents, edited by Wu Hung. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010.

Guo, Xi. “Guo Xi’s Writings on Landscape Painting.” In Asian Art, edited by Rebecca M. Brown and Deborah S. Hutton. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Hearn, Maxwell K. How to Read Chinese Paintings. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008.

Jing, Hao. “A Note on the Art of the Brush.” Translated by Kiyohiko Munakata and Yoko H. Munakata. Artibus Asiae 31 (1974): 11–16.

Ju, Jane C. “Chinese Art, the National Palace Museum, and Cold War Politics.” In Partisan Canons, edited by Anna Brzyski, 115–134. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

Keswick, Maggie. “Gardens of the Literati.” In The Chinese Garden: History, Art & Architecture. New York: Rizzoli, 1978.

Lin, Yao. “The First Chinese Painting History: Zhang Yanyuan’s Lidai minghua ji.” In A Companion to Chinese Art, edited by Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

Linz, Percival David. Chinese Painting: A Comprehensive Guide. New York: Rizzoli, 2012.

Luo, Yier. Dunhuang rencontre le Louvre : Qu’est-ce que la beauté ? Naturalogic Publishing, 2025.

Luo, Yier. Dunhuang Meets the Louvre: What Is Beauty? Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, 2023. ISBN-13: 978-7-313-27177-8.

Mao, Zedong. “Excerpts from Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong.” In Asian Art, edited by Rebecca M. Brown and Deborah S. Hutton. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Sun, Dazhang. Ritual and Ceremonial Buildings: Altars and Temples of Deities, Sages, and Ancestors. New York: CN Times Books, 2015.

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Silbergeld, Jerome. “The Evolution of Chinese Painting: Tang, Song, and Yuan Masterpieces.” In China: The Three Emperors 1662–1795. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005.

Wang, Xizhi. “Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Poems.” In An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911, edited and translated by Stephen Owen. New York: W. W. Norton, 1996.

Wu, Hung. “Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context.” In Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents, edited by Wu Hung. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010.

Wu, Hung. “Shang and Zhou Bronze Inscriptions.” In Asian Art, edited by Rebecca M. Brown and Deborah S. Hutton. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Wu, Hung. “The Nine Tripods and Traditional Chinese Concepts of Monumentality.” In Asian Art, edited by Rebecca M. Brown and Deborah S. Hutton. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Wu, Hung. Contemporary Chinese Art: A History, 1970s–2000s. London: Thames & Hudson, 2014.

Wu, Hung. Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Wu, Hung. The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Xie, He. “The Six Laws of Xie He.” In Asian Art, edited by Rebecca M. Brown and Deborah S. Hutton. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Content

Topic 1 – Introduction to Chinese Art and Visual Culture

- Disciplinary framework and central research themes of Chinese art history
- Cultural heritage values and criteria for distinguishing copies from forgeries
- Interrelationships between art and history, and between art and literature
- Social functions and historical significance of Chinese art

Topic 2 – The Origins of Chinese Civilization and Early Material Culture

- Early material culture from the Neolithic through the Zhou and Warring States period
- Early ritual systems and funerary traditions
- Visual characteristics, formal conventions, and spiritual meanings of funerary art (the art of the Yellow Springs)
- Foundations of early Chinese visual civilization

Topic 3 – Duanhuang Culture and the Murals of the Mogao Caves

- Comprehensive study of the Mogao Cave murals
- Artistic characteristics, production systems, pictorial narratives, and stylistic development

- China–West intercultural exchanges and their historical significance across a millennium
- Development of Dunhuang's visual arts

Topic 4 – Classical Chinese Aesthetics and the Foundation of Painting and Calligraphy

- Thematic repertoires, formats, formal conventions, brush-and-ink techniques, and tools of traditional painting and calligraphy
- Foundational works and theories: Wang Xizhi, Xie He's *Six Laws*, Guo Xi, and Jing Hao's *Bifa ji*
- A framework for understanding traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy aesthetics

Topic 5 – The Intellectual and Spiritual Foundations of Literati Paining and the Interpretation of Canonical Works

- Historical development, scholarly ideals, humanistic aesthetics, and cultural transmission of literati painting
- Close analysis of exemplary works from successive periods
- Scholarly ethos, ideals of reclusion, and aesthetic aspirations of this tradition

Topic 6 – Iconography Spatial Context and Cultural Meaning in Chinese Painting

- Close visual analysis using canonical paintings as case studies
- Symbolic systems, iconographic meanings, pictorial space, and compositional conventions
- Historical contexts and broader social meanings, intellectual concerns, and cultural foundations

Topic 7 – Chinese Ceramics from the Neolithic Period to the Qing Dynasty

- Early pottery traditions, vessel forms, and proto-porcelain from the Neolithic through the Northern and Southern dynasties
- Porcelain maturation, major kilns, and glaze aesthetics under the Sui, Tang, and Song
- Blue-and-white porcelain and Chinese–foreign technological exchanges under the Yuan and Ming
- Imperial and commercial kilns and polychrome porcelain under the Qing

Topic 8 – Jiangnan Garden Culture: Yu Garden and City God Temple

- History, design principles, spatial organization, and garden-making practices of Yu Garden
- Traditional teahouse culture and the history and folk traditions of the City God Temple
- Intersections of urban everyday life, popular culture, and classical garden art in Jiangnan

Topic 9 – Suzhou Gardens and Traditional Landscape Architecture

- Suzhou's regional history and Wu cultural traditions
- Garden design principles, spatial aesthetics, and modern reinterpretations at Suzhou Museum
- Jiangnan and Wu art and culture at the Wu Culture Museum
- History, functions, and design of the Humble Administrator's Garden;

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Topic 10 – Commercial and Political Contexts of Art from 1912 to Present

- Modern and contemporary Chinese art across the Republican and PRC periods
- Shaping influence of political, commercial, and social currents on artistic production
- Changes in visual expression, dissemination, and the art world

Topic 11 – Modern and Contemporary Chinese Painting after 1911

- Stylistic changes, technical innovations, and expanding subject matter after 1911
- Comparative analysis of historical and modern painting, including *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*
- Continuities, transformations, and innovations in the painting tradition

Topic 12 – Contemporary Art and the Global Art Market since 1989

- Transformations in Chinese contemporary art after 1989
- Artistic trends, media innovations, and conceptual developments in the new millennium
- Production, exhibition systems, market circulation, international dissemination, and global positioning

Topic 13 – Safeguarding Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage and Folk Visual Arts

- Institutional framework and contemporary development of intangible cultural heritage safeguarding
- Cultural origins, vernacular aesthetics, formal characteristics, and customary functions of folk art
- Historical transmission of folk art traditions
- Survival, adaptation, dissemination, and aesthetic renewal in contemporary society

Field study and experiential learning components may include:

- Shanghai Museum
- Shanghai Museum (East)
- West Bund Museum
- Power Station Museum
- ShanghART Gallery
- Dunhuang Contemporary Art Museum, Shanghai
- Yu Garden and City God Temple
- Wu Culture Museum, Suzhou
- Suzhou Museum
- Suzhou Humble Administrator's Garden
- Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Museum
- China Art Museum
- Long Museum
- Shanghai Museum of Arts and Crafts

Syllabus of Record is subject to minor changes in Term-specific Syllabus at faculty's discretion.