

China, Europe, and Representation II: Aestheticism, Modernization, and New-Confucian Cosmopolitanism

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Course Description

“Whither China?” has become one of the central questions in global public consciousness. This question about the future of a significant civilization and political entity is deeply related to the past of the representations of China in European cultural and intellectual history. The theoretical concern about how to approach and understand the making and the reality of China is of utmost importance. How or does the “West” know China? How or does China know the “West”? How does such a strict division between China and the “West” come into being? Does it make sense at all? Exploring these questions from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, this graduate seminar consists of two parts offered in two consecutive academic years. In the first part, students and I have explored the representations of China in European cultural and intellectual history from the early eighteenth to the early twentieth century including the Enlightenment Sinophile of Confucianism, Hegel’s historicism, and Weber’s and Spengler’s pessimistic view of the decline of the West and the look for a salvation in the East, in particular in Daoism.

The second part of this seminar focuses on the Chinese representations of Europe in the early twentieth century while further exploring the aestheticization of China as visual images in the Western tradition until today. We will read the British royal architect William Chambers’ *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1773) and contrast it to the French philosopher Voltaire’s adaptation of the Chinese drama *The Orphan of China: a Tragedy* (1759). While Voltaire’s moralist message got lost over the centuries, Chambers’s aestheticization remains with us until today. Then we will move to the Chinese representations of the West, especially Chinese intellectuals’ understandings of the Chinese tradition and their visions of the world. Two trends of thoughts competed with each other: the European-styled belief in a world marching toward modernization and the cosmopolitan belief in an integrated philosophy of east and west as the ethics of life. Readings include works by Zeng Pu, Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Xiong Shili, Mou Zongsan, Rudolf Eucken and Zhang Junmai.

Readings

William Chambers, *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1773)

Voltaire, *The Orphan of China: a Tragedy* (1759)

Kang Youwei, *Da Tong Shu. The Book of Great Unity* (1935)

Liang Qichao, *China and World Peace* (1920)

Zeng Pu, Nie Hai Hua (*Flowers in a Sea of Sins*, 1941)

Rudolf Eucken and Carsun Chang, *The Problem of Human Life in China and Europe* (1922)

Xiong Shili, and John Makeham. 2015. *New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness*.

Clower, Jason. *Late Works of Mou Zongsan : Selected Essays on Chinese Philosophy*

Buber, Martin. 1998. *Chinese tales: Zhuangzi, sayings and parables and Chinese ghost and love stories*. Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books.

Course Requirements

1. Regular attendance and participation in class discussion are indispensable. 20%
2. One oral presentation 20%
3. One short paper (5 pages, this paper could serve as a preliminary plan for the final paper but it does not have to) 20%
4. One term paper (around 15 pages) 40%

Weekly Schedule

TBA