CHES5150 Chinese Painting: Aesthetics and History

2020-2021, Term 1, Mondays 3:30pm – 6:15pm,

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Course Description
This course looks at the history and aesthetics of Chinese painting and its role in Chinese culture, showing that art and life often are closely intertwined with each other. The following themes will be dealt with: the aesthetic evaluation of painting; the pictorial features unique in Chinese ink painting; the roles of the artist and the spectator; the aesthetic principles of Chinese painting; the cultural hierarchy of painting, poetry and calligraphy; the aesthetic valuation of expressiveness and descriptiveness in painting; and the cultural correlation between the quality of a painting and the virtue of the painter. Historically, we will cover landscape painting since the Five Dynasties (907 to 960), the evolution of literati painting since the Song dynasty (960-1279), the evaluation of painting in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the eccentric culture in big cities in Qing China (1644-1911), and the cultural assimilation of European painting since the 20th century. We will deal with these topics by examining major works of painting and by analyzing primary texts as well as contemporary scholarly writings.

Learning Outcomes
After completing the course, students should:
- be equipped with the essential techniques to examine the pictorial features of any Chinese painting;
- have a basic understanding of Chinese painting history;
- be able to critically analyze various aesthetic and artistic issues in Chinese painting, and to participate in relevant scholarly debates.

Assessment Scheme
Students are required to express themselves in the form of an in-class seminar, a presentation, and a final paper. Students will need to do a short presentation and a written report of it examining an art work’s visual features. They are also required to write an academic paper in order to demonstrate their understanding of contemporary Chinese art by participating in the scholarly debates about the various aesthetic and artistic issues put forth in the course (please see the grading system below).
Remarks: If in-person contact is not allowed, all the assessments will be conducted online and be submitted in soft copy.

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/. With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of the policies, regulations and procedures.
Grading System (details will be provided in separate documents available in due course)
- Visual analysis – presentation (10%) and written report (10%)
- In-class seminar on one special topic (30%)
- Final paper (50%)

Course Schedule
Remarks: If in-person contact is not allowed, all the course contents will be conducted online.

Unit 1 – Introduction: Prejudices and Misconceptions (7 Sep)

Unit 2 – The Neolithic to the Han Dynasty: Picturehood vs Objecthood (14 Sep)

Unit 3 – The Three Kingdoms to the Tang Dynasty: The Six Laws (21 Sep)

Unit 4 – The Five Dynasties to the Northern Song Dynasty: Nature and Culture (28 Sep)

Unit 5 – The Southern Song Dynasty to the Yuan Dynasty: The Artist & the Personified (5 Oct)

Unit 6 – The Ming Dynasty: Art and Society (12 Oct)

Unit 7 – The Qing Dynasty: Art, Society, and China-Europe Interactions (19 Oct)

NO class on 26 Oct (public holiday)

Unit 8 - The 20th Century: Art, Chineseness and Global Context (2 Nov)
Unit 9 – Visual Analysis Presentation & Written Report Due (9 Nov)
Late submissions will NOT be accepted. Details will be provided in a separate document available in due course.

Unit 10 – Special Topic 1: Landscape Painting (16 Nov)

Unit 11 – Special Topic 2: Literati Painting (23 Nov)

Unit 12 – Special Topic 3: Chineseness and Aesthetic Essences (30 Nov)

Final Paper Due (7 Dec)
Late papers will NOT be accepted. Details will be provided in a separate document available in due course.

Remarks: PDF versions of all readings and assignments can be found on the CUHK Blackboard. Registered students may access the CHES5150 page by using their Student ID and OnePass password.