

2021 NCCU
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Art and Power in China: the Collections of the National Palace Museum

Instructor's Name & Profile

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Course Dates & Time

July 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14
13:10 p.m. – 16 p.m.

Course Objectives

This course explores the relationship between art and power in Chinese history through the collections of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. Founded in 1965, the Museum has since been home to significant treasures of Chinese art formerly housed in the Forbidden City. The establishment of the museum in itself bears witness to major power struggles in modern Chinese history, and the collections - which include materials ranging from jades, bronzes, ceramics, books and textiles to paintings and calligraphy - exemplify the ways in which art has been used to manifest power and assert political legitimacy in Chinese civilization from prehistory to the modern era. By looking at collections and the history of the Museum, this course aims to help students to:

- Acquire some basic knowledge of Chinese art history;
- Become aware of the relevant issues behind the production and consumption of some major categories of Chinese art;
- Achieve familiarity with some major masterpieces in the museum collection;
- Develop critical skills of looking and visual analysis;
- Enjoy the pleasures and education afforded by exploring the museum

Course Outline or Topics

Session 1 (July 5) The History of the National Palace Museum: Past, Present, and Future

Contents:

- Course design, program description (grading, team assignments, etc.)
- Introduction to the history of the National Palace Museum, focusing on the relationship between collecting and state power

Session 2 (July 6) Jades: From Ceremonial Objects to Personal Accessories

Preparation:

Review the exhibition website of 'Art in Quest of Heaven and Truth'
https://www.npm.edu.tw/exh99/chinese_jades/en/page-1.html

Contents:

- The uses of jades from the Neolithic era to imperial periods
- Cultural exchanges between China and Central and South Asia as seen in the material and craftsmanship of jades in the 18th century

Session 3 (July 7) Ritual Bronzes: from Ancestral Treasures to Collectors' Objects of Desire

Preparation:

Review the exhibition website of 'Rituals Cast in Brilliance: Chinese Bronzes through the Ages'
<https://www.npm.edu.tw/exh99/bronzes/en/page-1.html>

Contents:

- The production of bronzes and their uses in ancestral rituals in the Shang and Zhou periods
- The study of epigraphy and the development of the connoisseurship of bronzes in the Song Dynasty
- The discovery and symbolic meaning of Mao-kung Ting (Ding vessel of the Duke of Mao) in the modern era

Session 4 (July 12) Calligraphy: The Aesthetics of Writing

Preparation:

Review the exhibition website of 'The Expressive Significance of Brush and Ink'
<https://theme.npm.edu.tw/exh109/calligraphy10907/en/page-1.html>

Contents:

- Introduction to the writing scripts of China
- The rise of calligraphy as the prominent form of aesthetic appreciation in China from the 3rd century
- The legend of *Lanting xu* (*Preface to the Orchid Pavilion* by Wang Xizhi) and the discourses and practices of copy making in China
- The two calligraphy traditions: Model-book school (*tiexue*) and stele schools (*beixue*)

Session 5 (July 13) Paintings of Harmonious Ruling

Preparation:

Review the exhibition website of 'Up the River During Qingming in the Museum Collection'

https://theme.npm.edu.tw/exh105/RiverQingming/en/index.html#section_1

Contents:

- Understanding the monumental landscape paintings (Three Treasures of the Song): *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* by Fan Kuan, *Early Spring* by Guo Xi and *Wind in Pines among a Myriad Valleys* by Li Tang
- Exploring the Qing court version of *Up the River During Qingming*

Session 6 (July 14) The Emperor's Paraphernalia: Ceramics and Other Obsessions

Preparation:

Review the exhibition websites of:

1. 'The Magic of the Kneaded Clay' <https://www.npm.edu.tw/exh99/ceramics/en/page-1.html>
2. 'Curio Boxes of Qianlong Emperor' <https://south.npm.gov.tw/English/ExhibitionsDetailE003110.aspx?Cond=0807dff4-cf87-4ad7-89b4-681292600119&appname=Exhibition3112EN>

Contents:

- The role of the state in the production of ceramics and the famous kilns
- Emperor Qianlong's collecting and appreciation of ancient ceramics
- Emperor Qianlong's curio boxes

Course requirements/ Grading Standards

Participation (60%)

- Team activities and participation: 60 pts
- Bonus points and penalties: personal participation- up to 10 bonus pts; 10 pts penalty for each session of absence)

Essay (40 %)

- You may choose one of the following topics for your essay:
 - 1) A critical analysis of one current exhibition in the museum.
 - 2) A short essay introducing the key features of one favourite object (or small group of objects) you have seen in the museum, and the issues of art historical interest which it raises in relation to the themes of the course (art and power).
- Word limit: 2000 words.