

EALC 24255/34255 HIST 24507/34507

Everyday Maoism: Work, Daily Life, and Material Culture in Socialist China

Autumn 2018

Rosenwald 015

Tue Thu 12:30 – 1:50

Instructor:

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Office hours Mon 9:30-11:00, Fri 1:30-12:30.

Please book your appointments through CANVAS!

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The history of Maoist China is usually told as a sequence of political campaigns: land and marriage reform, nationalization of industry, anti-rightist campaign, Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, etc. Yet for the majority of the Chinese population, the promise of socialism was as much about material improvements as it was about political change: a socialist revolution would bring about “two-storey brick houses, electric lights and telephones” (*loushang louxia, diandeng dianhua*), new work regimes and new consumption patterns. If we want to understand what socialism meant for different groups of people, we have to look at the “new objects” of socialist modernity, at changes in dress codes and apartment layouts, at electrification and city planning – or at the absence of such changes and the persistence of older patterns of material life under a new, socialist veneer.

In this course, we will analyze workplaces and labor processes in order to understand how socialism changed the way people worked, and look at rationing and consumption in the households to see how socialism affected them at home. We will look at how specific objects came to stand in for the Maoist revolution, for socialist modernity, or for feudal backwardness. We will ask to which extent a new ideology and new values found their expressions in material life, and to which extent radical change was stymied by the stubbornness of things. The course has a comparative dimension: we will read literature on socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, to see how Chinese socialism differed from its cousins. Another aim is methodological. How do Material Culture and Everyday Life approaches help us understand the lives of people who wrote little and were rarely written about? How do we read people's life experiences out of the material record of their lives? What would a *material* history of Chinese socialism look like?

Format: The main components of the course are two weekly lectures and online discussion sections led by teaching assistants. In addition, there is a voluntary (not-for-credit) language component for students who want to read and discuss materials in Chinese.

Lectures: the size of the class (60 students) makes discussion difficult, but I encourage you to read the assigned literature *before* the lecture and to prepare questions, which you can send to me before class (I will then try to address them in my lecture) or raise during class. All readings are in English and will be posted on Canvas.

Sections: we will have 3 sections of 20 students each. Sections will not meet in physical space but will discuss the weekly readings online, using the CANVAS discussion function. Twice a week, your TA will post questions relating to the weekly readings. You are expected to respond to them in much the same way as you would in class, by asking questions about the assigned readings and expressing your agreement or disagreement, and engaging in a discussion about the texts with the TAs and your peers. As in a physical classroom, you're expected to 'speak up' in most sessions, to show that you have read and thought about the text. Your TA will give you more specific instructions, and may require you to post a certain number of times, or post within a specific timeframe. Your TA will also ask you to write a certain number of slightly longer posts (200-250 words) in which you engage with the texts in more detail.

"Language across the Curriculum" (LxC) section(s): these are voluntary sections for students who speak some Chinese but are not native speakers and want to improve their language skills by reading and discussing texts related to the content of the course. Depending on how many students are interested, we may have only one section, or several at different levels. Depending on your language skills, texts may include speeches by political leaders such as Mao Zedong, or documents of daily life such as letters, diaries, police files, etc.

Assignments: You will write one 5-page paper based on a documentary or Chinese feature film, and a 10-page research paper. In the film paper (due on Friday of week 5) you will focus on a specific aspect (a material object or a social practice) in one of the following films:

- Joris Ivens' documentary on everyday life in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution: *Shanghai: Pharmacy No. 3*
- 女理发师 "The Woman Barber," Ding Ran 1962, comedy about a woman who wants to become a barber, against the resistance of her conservative husband.
- 满意不满意? "Are you satisfied?" Yan Gong 1963, comedy about a waiter who learns to "serve the people".
- 千万不要忘记, "Never forget (class struggle)," Xie Tieli 1964, a warning about the evils of bourgeois consumerism and ideological backsliding.

The **final paper** (10 pages, due at the end of exam week) can be (a) an object description based on a physical object (or group of objects) or an item in an exhibition catalog, (b) a description of a material practice, based on illustrated journals such as *China Pictorial*, or (c) a topic of your choice.

- (a) you describe an object (a garment, a propaganda poster, a decorated wash basin, etc.), based on direct observation or on a photograph, in as much detail as you can. You try to reconstruct how it was made, how it was sold or distributed, who may have owned it, who it was used, what it meant (in case it had a meaning – not all objects do), etc.
- (b) you reconstruct a material practice from images. For example, there are thousands of photos showing people holding a little red booklet containing Mao quotes. What can you say about

these images? How do people hold the book, what else are they doing, when do such images appear and disappear, etc.

- (c) if you are interested in any particular aspect of everyday life, discuss with your TA or with me. We will help you refine the topic and find secondary literature.

Plan to have a paper topic by week five and discuss your progress with your TA in advance. The use of Chinese sources is encouraged for those with language skills, but not required.

Grading key: Lecture attendance 5%. Canvas postings 35%. Film paper 20%. Final paper 40%.

Academic Honesty: The usual rules (<https://college.uchicago.edu/advising/academic-integrity-student-conduct>) apply. You are responsible for knowing what constitutes plagiarism and what does not. If in doubt, ask me, your TA, or your academic adviser.

Schedule:

week 1: introduction

Oct 2: General introduction (no assigned readings)

Oct 4: "What is familiar is not known" (Hegel): Introduction to the Concept of Everyday Life

- Tom Harrison, Humphrey Jennings, and Charles Madge, "Mass Observation," in Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, pp. 145-48.
- Georges Perec, "Approaches to What?" in Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, pp. 176-78.
- Guy Debord, "Perspectives for conscious alterations in everyday life" Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, 237-45.
- Michel de Certeau: *The Practice of Everyday Life*, "Introduction," Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, pp. 63-75. Read pp. 64-66 (up to *The formal structure of practice*) and pp. 69-71 (section on *Trajectories, tactics, and rhetorics*)

week 2: Histories of Everyday Life

Oct 9: "Question your tea spoon" (Georges Perec) – Everyday Life in Europe and Japan

- Fernand Braudel: *The structures of everyday life* (vol. 1 of *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th to 18th Century*), chapter 3, "Food and Drink."
- Susan B. Hanley, *Everyday Things in Japan: The Hidden Legacy of Material Culture*, chapter 3.

Oct 11: Object lessons: how things shape our lives

- Norbert Elias, "The Rise of the Fork" in J. Goudsblom and S. Mennell, eds. *The Norbert Elias Reader*, pp 51-54.

- Francesca Bray, *Technology, Gender, and History in Imperial China*, chapter 1: "Machines for living: domestic architecture and the engineering of the social order in late imperial China."

week 3: Changing Material Cultures in Republican China

Oct 16: New Things for A New People: Patriotic Consumption in the Republic

- Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation*, chapter 2.
- Helen M. Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China*, chapter 1 "The Ideology of the Happy Family."

Oct 18: Making ends meet

- Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing: The City and its Histories*, chapter 6: "Recycling: The Tianqiao District."
- Lu Hanchao, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century*, chapter 5: "Behind stone portals."

week 4: Dreaming Soviet Dreams

Oct 23: "Palaces on Monday:" Socialism and the Transformation of Everyday Life in Stalin's Soviet Union

- Trotsky, "Habit and Custom," Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, pp. 83-84.
- Sheila Fitzpatrick: *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times*, Oxford University Press 2000. Introduction and chapters 2-4.

Oct 25: The Soviet Union's Today is our Tomorrow: China in the early 1950s

- Frederik Wakeman, "Cleanup: The New Order in Shanghai," in Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz, *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*.

week 5: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

Oct 30: The Regime of Goods in Mao-Era Urban China

- Martin King Whyte and William Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China*, chapters 3 and 4.

Nov 1: Overwork and Underconsumption in Rural China

- Lu Hanchao: "Out of the Ordinary: Implications of Material Culture and Everyday Life in China," in Madeleine Yue Dong and Joshua Goldstein, *Everyday Modernity in China*.

- Eyferth, Jacob: "Less for More: Rural Women's Overwork and Underconsumption in Mao's China," *Clio: Femmes Genre Histoire*, vol. 41 (2015), special issue, "Le 'socialisme réel' à l'épreuve du genre," pp. 65-87.

week 6: "For the People, food is heaven"

Nov 6: Feast ...

- Mark Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Urban Experience in Shanghai*. Stanford UP 2009. Chapter 5: "Serve the People: Socialist Transformations of China's Food Culture."
- James L. Watson, "Meat: A Cultural Biography in (South) China," in *Food Consumption in Global Perspective: Essays in the Anthropology of Food in Honour of Jack Goody*, Jacob Klein and Anne Murcott, eds.

Nov 8: Famine

- Felix Wemheuer: "'The Grain Problem is an Ideological Problem': Discourses of Hunger in the 1957 Socialist Education Campaign," In Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer, *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine*, University of British Columbia Press 2011.
- James L. Watson, "Feeding the Revolution: Public Mess Halls and Coercive Commensality in Maoist China," in Everett Zhang, Arthur Kleinman, and Tu Wei-ming, *Governance of Life in Chinese Moral Experience: The Quest for an Adequate Life*.
- Sketches of Urban Communes in the Capital 《首都城市人民公社速写》 北京: 人民美术出版社, 1960. <http://prchistory.org/urban-communes/> (these sketches show life and work in collective factories organized in 1958-60 during the Urban Commune movement. Look at them and try to identify the activities depicted.)

week 7: Clothes and homes in Mao-era China

Nov 13: "China's women love battle array, not silk and satin"

Readings:

- Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation*, chapter 8.
- Tina May Chen, "Proletarian White and Working Bodies in Mao's China," *positions: east asian cultural critique*, 11:2 (Fall 2003).

Nov 15: Socialist Domesticity

- Li Jie. *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life*, chapters 1 and 2.

week 8: Work is glorious

Nov 20: "Production" and "chores"

- Song Shaopeng, "The State Discourse on Housewives and Housework in the 1950s in China," in Mechthild Leutner, ed. *Rethinking China in the 1950s* (Berliner Chinahefte vol. 31).
- Stevan Harrell, "The Changing Meanings of Work in China," in Barbara Entwistle and Gail E. Henderson (eds), *Re-Drawing Boundaries: Work, Household and Gender in China*, Berkeley.

Nov 22: Thanksgiving

week 9: Ordinary and extraordinary objects

Nov 27: The comradely object

- Boris Arvatov, "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing," *October*, vol. 81 (Summer 1997).
- Wu Hung and Song Dong, *Waste Not* (exhibition catalog, Song Dong and Zhao Xiangyuan), introduction and chapter on Clothes.

Nov 29: Objects of worship

- Alfreda Murck, "Golden Mangoes: The Life Cycle of a Cultural Revolution Symbol," *Archives of Asian Art*, vol 57 (2007)

week 10: Emotions and Private Life

Dec 4: Emotions and Private Life under Socialism

- Lee Haiyan, "Nowhere in the World Does There Exist Love or Hatred Without Reason," in WANG Ban, ed. *Words and their Stories: The Language of the Cultural Revolution*. Brill 2011.
- Neil J. Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949-1968*, chapter 5.