

History 1422

How to Come Apart: A Decompositional History of Late Imperial China

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Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom

Class Hours: Tu & Th 9.30-10.45 AM, 208A Cathedral of Learning

This course explores the history of China from the Tang empire through the mid-Qing dynasty. **Late imperial China** is a fascinating historical period. The course is devoted to helping you understand how to creatively and rigorously interpret its primary documents (including texts, artifacts, and, where possible, sensations) alongside recent historical writing about Chinese history. Rather than taking the existence of a timeless and monolithic “China” for granted, we will explore the various ways in which late imperial lands and peoples have been formed and re-formed in order to situate the period within broader narratives of global history. Students will gain experience in the art and techniques of advanced historical analysis, using both traditional and non-traditional sources. Fun will be had. Undue stress, to the extent possible, will be avoided. Deep thoughts will be both conceived, and put into writing, by you. Bad jokes about *The Manchu Anatomy* will be made.

In order to explore this history of late imperial China, we will have the help of a guiding theme to set our path and anchor our conversations. While most histories of modern empire are concerned with things, people, and ideas coming together, we will instead be thinking about modern history as **a history of things coming apart**. Breakdowns, decompositions, unravelings: these will be the keys to the history we will be learning together this term. With that said, there are many ways of coming apart, each with different consequences and facilitating different opportunities for invention and re-creation. We will explore a different one each week - in some weeks more directly than others - as we wind our way from the Tang through the Qing Dynasty.

For me, **history is all about questions**, and studying history is much less about looking for answers than it is about carefully attending to evidence in order to learn how to ask the kinds of questions that create space within which we can move, think, and be together. I would ask you to keep the following guiding questions in mind throughout the semester:

- How do we learn to tell stories about/with the past that are also ways of telling stories about, & coming to know, ourselves in the process?
- How do we learn to engage with history as a way of thinking otherwise?
- How do we engage history (of China) in order to better understand contemporary phenomena (and questions they raise and that inform them)? And how might that historical understanding help us to orient to the future in a more creative and informed way?

- What are the most generative relationships we can create together between you, me, and Chinese history? What do you want your relationship with late imperial Chinese history to be? And what can or should we be doing, together, to help get you there?

On teaching and learning in a pandemic

Whew, two years and counting, comrades! Here we are once again at the start of an academic semester during a pandemic. With that in mind, I want to lay out what our class approach will be in order to surf the wave:

- We will be following Pitt COVID policies as they unfold. Please make sure to regularly check in at <https://www.coronavirus.pitt.edu/> for updates. I will also email you at your Pitt email addresses with any COVID-related class updates: please check your email daily!
- Even when they are not formally required, everyone is very welcome and encouraged to wear masks whenever they'd like. Check Pitt's dashboard (linked above) regularly to find the Pittsburgh campus community COVID levels and associated masking rules: Masks are required indoors when the CDC COVID-19 Community Level is High. Masks are optional when the Community Level is Medium or Low. When Pitt's rules require masks indoors (i.e., when the Community Level is high), I will also require everyone to be masked up in class. When Pitt's rules make masks optional, you are free to decide for yourselves what you are most comfortable with. You will probably see me masking up in class more often than not, since I've tended to be conservative about risk management during the pandemic, and wearing a mask makes me feel more comfortable in circumstances of pandemic uncertainty.
- If you are feeling unwell: please stay home! This is one way that we care for and protect ourselves and each other. I will never require a doctor's note, nor will you be penalized for your absence.
- We may occasionally have to pivot to online instruction, depending on how the pandemic and semester unfolds. If and when we need to do that, I will email you with updates, directions, and a Zoom link. Silver lining: in that case, you will get to meet my cat, Deke, who is an extremely high-quality feline. He will be glad to meow at you and demand your attention from the screen.

On our course objective

In this course, you will learn something about late imperial China, and about yourselves. So say we all.

On the texts we will be reading

There is no need to purchase books for the course. Instead, readings will be freely available for you to download through Canvas.

On our Canvas site

To access Canvas: log into my.pitt.edu, click on the link for “Canvas,” and navigate to the relevant Canvas course site. Y'all should have access to [2231 HIST 1422 SEC1000](#).

On that site you will find: the course readings, the syllabus, the weekly guides, and other course documents. Think of this as the course archive of materials that I'll share with you. You can navigate to the relevant section of the main Canvas site by clicking on the options listed down the left side of the page, as follows:

To access the syllabus on the Canvas site: Click "Syllabus"

To access course readings, weekly guides, class letters, and other documents on the main Canvas site:

1. Click "Files"
2. Click the folder for the relevant week (e.g., "Week 1 Materials (Aug 29-Sept 2)")

You will also find the weekly thinkpiece discussion board on our site.

To post thinkpieces/responses on our Canvas site:

1. Make sure you've read the thinkpiece/response assignment on the Weekly Guide for that week.
2. Head over to our Canvas site and click "Discussions"
3. Navigate to the discussion board for the week that you're posting to. Each Friday, I'll move the following week's discussion board to "Pinned Discussions."
4. To post a thinkpiece, click the link for "Reply" under the main heading, and follow the directions. You can also post attachments in your response.
5. To respond to another colleague's thinkpiece, click on their thread, hit "Reply," and post your response.

If you have tech trouble with the site (logging in, etc.), contact the Pitt IT helpdesk here: <https://www.technology.pitt.edu/247-it-help-desk>. If you have other questions about using the Canvas site, ask me.

The Importance of Checking Email

Y'all, **IT IS VITAL** that you check your Pitt email regularly, as email is the primary medium that I will use to contact you about the course. I will be all up in your inboxes with Very Important (or sometimes Moderately Important) (or sometimes Not At All Important But Significantly Cat-Related) Email Things. I aim to check email twice per weekday (once in the morning, and once in the late afternoon), and not on weekends. If you send me an email after 5 pm on Friday, I will most likely respond Monday morning. Otherwise I aim for a 24-hour response time.

Assignments and Expectations:

- **Come to class!** Showing up is absolutely crucial. Please give the class your full attention while you're there. In lecture and discussion, please do not talk on your cellphone, text your friends or lovers, watch old episodes of Love Island, play Wordle, hold spontaneous

séances to communicate with your departed pet gerbil, or have private conversations amongst yourselves. Let's all try to be there for each other, together, for those 1.5-ish hours at a time. If and when we're Zooming, if you're able to turn your camera on it really helps to foster a sense of community even as we're scattered across Pittsburgh (or wherever). I'll never require you to turn on your camera, but do know that I appreciate seeing your faces whenever possible. (It really does make a difference!)

- Thoughtfully **do the reading** for each class session! Class sessions will usually include a combination of lecture and discussion of the week's reading materials and the questions that they help us to think through. Please thoughtfully do the reading before class!
- Read the weekly guide each week and write a **weekly thinkpiece** (and occasionally **thinkpiece response**)! You are required to post a thinkpiece (and occasionally also to respond to the post of one other student) every week, unless otherwise indicated by The Management.

****Starting in Week 2 of classes, thinkpieces must be posted each week by Wednesday at noon** (unless otherwise indicated by The Management). When they are assigned, responses to a classmate's thinkpiece can be posted by Thursday at noon (unless otherwise indicated).**

Thinkpieces are meant for you to have a space to think about the week's readings and issues before you come to our Thursday class session each week. Many thinkpieces will be designed to help you develop a particular critical reading and writing skill. Aim for about a page worth of material: they need not be any longer than 250-500 words, but you can take whatever space you need. You should feel free to use the space as creatively as you'd like: raise questions, work through something in the readings that particularly interested or troubled you, etc. But please be careful and thoughtful in your writing and show that you've done the assigned reading: **engage the reading directly and cite pages or passages where appropriate**. Aside from that, be as creative as you wanna be in approaching these thinkpiece assignments. Do your thing.

The thinkpieces are meant not only for me to have a sense of how you all are thinking about each week's material before we meet, but also to make different kinds of space for us to hear as many voices in our class as possible. By posting on Canvas, you'll be sharing your reflections with each other. The audience for your work is thus the community of the class: that includes the professor (that's me!), but isn't limited to the professor. You'll be writing and thinking for yourselves, for/with your teacher, and for/with each other.

In your responses to colleagues' posts, when they are assigned, please be respectful of each other. Your response does not need to be lengthy. It's intended to

encourage you to begin discussion before you get to class, and to start forming an intellectual community with each other. Responses should be thoughtful: we're aiming for engagement beyond, "I agree," or "That's cool!"

- Take **feedback** into account when working on your reading/writing from week to week! There are many ways to receive feedback this term:

Each week, I will be reading the thinkpieces (yes, all of them!), and most weeks I will be composing a collective class letter for y'all on the following Monday that reflects on some highlights and suggestions on what to work on.

****In addition to the class letter, please make an appointment to talk with me about your writing at least once this semester, any time after Week 4:** at these periodic check-ins, we will talk about your thinkpieces so far, reflect on your writing goals, make some suggestions, and focus on what you'd like to work on, all one-on-one. You can arrange this via email to nappi@pitt.edu.

You are also absolutely welcome – nay, encouraged! – to come see me via my Zoom office hours as much as you'd like this term to talk about your writing.

If you want immediate (week-by-week) feedback on some aspect of your work, please ***email Carla that week*** after you post to say so. For example: "This week I tried to work on close reading, and I would appreciate feedback on that aspect of my writing!" or "This week I made an argument in an audio recording: can you listen and let me know if it makes sense?" In that case, just email me after you post it, and I'll happily respond. Thumbs-up emoji. Smiley-face cat emoji. All of the encouraging emojis.

- Complete **three self-reflections!** The grading system in this course works somewhat differently from what you might be used to. That'll be explained below. Because of that, you'll write **three self-reflections** over the term to reflect on your goals for the course and how you think you're doing in meeting or transforming them. These self-reflection assignments will be described in your Weekly Guides. You'll submit a written self-reflection to Carla at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, and we will meet for a one-on-one conference at the end of the semester to talk about your final self-reflection together.
- **Meet with Carla!** This is just a repeat of what I mentioned above so that you don't miss it: as long as everything goes to plan, you should be meeting with me via Zoom for a one-on-one conference AT LEAST TWO times this semester: at least ONCE to talk about your writing (or more if you like!), and ONCE at the very end of the semester to chat about your final self-reflection.

Of course, you're absolutely encouraged to come see me in my Zoom room as much as you'd like. Just email me to make an appointment for a time that works for you.

On Grading

In this course, you are not competing with one another. There are no exams. You will not receive letter grades on individual assignments: instead, I will offer feedback in class letters and in individual discussions with you over the course of the term. You can expect feedback that looks like: here's what worked particularly well, here's what you should work on, next time try this or that. I will read the thinkpieces each week, will respond to you all in periodic class letters, and will periodically touch base with you individually to talk about what you'd like to work on, what's going well, etc. And here is the really important grading-related thing that you need to know:

You will decide the final grade that you receive for the course.

You'll do this with the help of three self-reflections, and we will talk about the final grade together in a one-on-one conference at the end of classes. Your final self-grade is not a matter of what you think you deserve, or what you want: it's entirely a matter of coming to a decision, with thoughtfulness and integrity, as to *what grade your work has earned*, taking the syllabus criteria below as a guideline.

If you complete all of the work (the reading, the writing, the class attendance and participation) thoughtfully and on time, that should constitute an **A range grade**. Here's what that will likely look like:

- **Showing up**: You came to the course sessions regularly. When you needed to be absent or late, you communicated this to me, in advance of the absence wherever possible. You listened attentively and vocally contributed to the conversation to the degree that you were comfortable doing so. You developed and reflected on your own goals for the term in three self-reflections and in meetings with me, allowing for the probability that your goals would change over time as you did, and reflecting on that in the context of the course.
- **Thoughtful and respectful participation**: You (1) kept up with the reading in the course, and demonstrated that to our community through your (2) generous and respectful participation in the class discussions, and your (3) thinkpieces and responses. (In this course we will also acknowledge that not everyone is equally comfortable speaking up in class, and that's completely fine. I will work with you to help you develop your comfort in doing so: just let me know if this is something you'd like to work on this term and we'll do it together).
- **Writing and reading**: You completed all of the required thinkpieces and responses thoughtfully and (barring serious extenuating circumstances) on time. You followed the guidelines provided for each week's assignment and directly engaged the readings (citing evidence from them as appropriate).

If, at the end of the semester, you decide to assess your work for the term with a **B, C, or D range grade**, it will likely be because you didn't manage some or much of what is described above. We'll talk about that together. If you decide that you have earned a grade of **A+**, this should represent extraordinary work above and beyond expectations.

For the purpose of this class, a failing **F** grade isn't a grade as much as an acknowledgment that you did not show up and/or do the work. Submitting work that is plagiarized – work that is not your own and/or that you have copied from someone or somewhere else – effectively constitutes not doing the work and will result in a failure for the term.

****Important Note****: This self-grading scheme assumes presence and timely participation. Students who are consistently absent from class and/or who consistently don't submit the required work or participate in the self-reflection process will default to a final letter grade that I will assign, based on the work (including presence and participation) that the student has completed. In that case, I reserve the right to change or assign a final grade, where appropriate.

Policy on Late Work

Please hand in your work on time. Being in this course together means that we are agreeing to doing a number of things that keep our community working, and handing in work on time is one of those things. Here's why handing in work on time is important:

- It allows me to provide you with timely and thoughtful feedback. If you don't hand in materials on time, I will not necessarily be able to do that.
- It demonstrates respect for yourself and your colleagues, and allows us to benefit from your contributions to class.
- It keeps you on track in terms of the course workload.

All of that is to say: please do your best to hand your work in on time, even if it's not complete or doesn't do everything you wanted it to. Many of us have that experience, and have to battle demons of perfectionism. (Beliiiiieeeeeve me, I get it.) Rather than submit to those demons: please submit whatever you have when it's due, and we can sit down together with the little perfectionism demons afterward and bake them cookies and put on *The Sandman* for them to binge on Netflix, at least to distract them for a while even if they're not completely vanquished. If for any emergency-based reason it needs to be late, please let me know ASAP.

With all of that said, I understand that sometimes Life happens and when Life happens it can be impossible to complete your coursework on time. If Life happens to you, please contact me as soon as possible and we'll talk.

On the syllabus elements that Pitt requires that I include on this syllabus.

You can find Pitt's [Academic Integrity Statement at this link](#), and [Pitt's Disability Resource Statement at this other link](#).

And this is me in my own voice, on respect and academic integrity: Because you are ultimately grading yourself based on your own sense of what your goals are and what you achieved relative to them (understanding and embracing the fact that they might change over time), there's really no need to consider turning in work that isn't your own. Honestly and

truly. Please don't do that. If you find yourself experiencing the kind of stress that, in my experience, most often leads to plagiarism stemming from a worry that you don't have the time or ability to otherwise complete an assignment on time, come talk to me and we'll work it out. If you need more time, it's best to just...take more time. No big deal. If the assignments start feeling like a burden or a source of undue stress, come talk to me and we'll adjust as needed. In any given semester, most humans experience difficult circumstances of one sort or another that get in the way of coursework. That is completely normal. It will likely happen to me, as well. It's all good. It's ok to be human. If you're having a hard time for whatever reason, please let me know and I'll work with you to accommodate it.

And this is me in my own voice, on disability resources and services: I'm here to help. Please do let me know if you need any accommodations at all, for any reason, with or without official documentation. **You don't ever need a doctor's note for an absence**, in this class: just let me know what you need and I'll do my best to accommodate. By prioritizing everyone's health and wellbeing (e.g., making time for sufficient human stuff like sleep, eating, rest, etc., and that's true of both students and the prof!), we'll make it all work. Your education should not have to be overly stressful, nor will we treat it as an extreme sport. Please take good care of your bodymind this term. Reach out at any point if you're having trouble balancing classwork with whatever you need to do to take care of yourself, and we'll figure out a path forward.

Weekly Plan

OK, back to our regularly scheduled programming: Chinese history! Woohoo! Over the course of the semester, we'll be exploring several ways in which the history of late imperial China is also a history of how things come apart. The following is a sketch of the architecture of our semester together, but The Management reserves the right to adjust it as we go, in order to maximize general awesomeness. You'll find details in the weekly guides. Excelsior!

Week 1 (Tu Aug 30 & Th Sept 1)	Burning
Week 2 (Tu Sept 6 & Th Sept 8)	Burial
Week 3 (Tu Sept 13 & Th Sept 15)	Fracture/Ruin/Reliquary
Week 4 (Tu Sept 20 & Th Sept 22)	Erosion
Week 5 (Tu Sept 27 & Th Sept 29)	Intoxication/Forgetting
Week 6 (Tu Oct 4 & Th Oct 6)	Butchery
Week 7 (Tu Oct 11 & Th Oct 13)	CAAPP Week: No class!
Week 8 (Tu Oct 18 & Th Oct 20)	Sampling/Remix
Week 9 (Tu Oct 25 & Th Oct 27)	Etymology
Week 10 (Tu Nov 1 & Th Nov 3)	Death/Haunting
Week 11 (Tu Nov 8 & Th Nov 10)	Rotting
Week 12 (Tu Nov 15 & Th Nov 17)	Dreaming/Sleeping
Week 13 (Tu Nov 29 & Th Dec 01)	Laughter/Breath
Week 14 (Tu Dec 06 & Th Dec 08)	Final one-on-one meetings