

## RECOMMENDED READINGS AND FILMS

### Books:

#### Fiction by Chinese authors or about China:

*Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* by Lisa See (Random House, 2005)

A story of Lily and Snow Flower, two best friends in the 1800s, following their lives and highlighting a historically-accurate special system of writing that was only known and used by women.

*Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* by Dai Sijie (Anchor, 2002)

A semi-autobiographical novel set during the Cultural Revolution about two sons sent to the countryside to be “re-educated.” They meet a tailor’s daughter and discover several smuggled Western novels which allow them to escape from their situation in their imaginations.

*The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck (Pocket Books, 1989)

A Pulitzer-prize winning novel following the story of a family of peasants and their relationship with a family of wealthy landowners.

*Becoming Madame Mao* by Anchee Min (Houghton Mifflin Books, 2001)

Historical fiction exploring the personality and possible motivations of Madame Mao, who many people abhor for her role during the Cultural Revolution.

*Soul Mountain* by Gao Xingjian (Harper Perennial, 2001)

A semi-autobiographical novel about the protagonist’s journey to find an elusive, sacred mountain. Gao uses poetry, folk legends, and multiple narrators and characters to describe this voyage.

*The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Fiction* edited by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt (Columbia University Press, 1996)

An excellent collection of modern short stories by famous Chinese authors.

*Six Records of a Floating Life* by Shen Fu

A great introduction to China’s educational roots. Follows the unsuccessful career and successful marriage of a nineteenth century magistrate’s secretary.

*Half of Man is Woman* by Xianliang Zhang (W.W. Norton, 1988)

The semi-autobiographical story of a poet sentenced to a labor camp during the Cultural Revolution.

*Diary of a Madman* by Lu Xun

One of the first modern and famous works written in Chinese vernacular by the famous author Lu Xun, a short story exploring feudalism’s role in the lives of the Chinese people through the diary of a madman.

*Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin (alternate spelling Tsao Hsueh-Chin)

An excellent introduction to life in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese aristocracy with a particular emphasis on female characters. This book is considered one of China’s “Four Great Classical Novels.”

### Nonfiction about China's Economy or History:

*Mao: The Unknown Story* by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday (Jonathan Cape, 2005)

The most recent comprehensive exploration of the life and actions of Mao Zedong. This book makes use of newly opened archives and interviews with hundreds of people who were close to the chairman.

*God's Chinese Son* by Jonathan Spence (W.W. Norton and Co, 1997)

An eloquent description of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Taiping Rebellion in China, led by a Chinese Christian fanatic who had been influenced by missionaries.

*The Search for Modern China* by Jonathan Spence (W.W. Norton and Co, 1990)

One of the most acclaimed and easy-to-read general introductions to modern China. Often used as a textbook in modern Chinese history courses at universities, it is enjoyable even for someone with a casual interest in Chinese history.

*1421: The Year China Discovered the World* by Gavin Menzies (Bantam Books, 2004)

A controversial book claiming that the Chinese explored the world before the Europeans.

*China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising Power* by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (Vintage, 1995)

Husband and wife team Kristof and WuDunn describe their experiences living in China from 1988 to 1993 as journalists. A great account of their coverage of a variety of social topics, including religion, politics, gender issues, urban vs. rural.

*China, Inc.: How the Rise of the Next Superpower Challenges America and the World* by Ted C. Fishman (Scribner, 2006)

A great book filled with telling vignettes and specific examples describing the way in which the Chinese economy is transforming the world.

*The Elephant and the Dragon: The Rise of China and India and What it Means for All of Us* by Robyn Meredith (W.W. Norton, 2008)

Meredith takes the controversial stance in this book that China and India's rising economies should not be a cause for concern or alarm in the United States.

*China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers are Transforming a Culture* by Jianying Zha (New Press, 1996)

A native Beijinger's perspective on how western pop culture and mass media is changing Chinese culture.

### Nonfiction Memoirs:

*Wild Swans* by Jung Chang (Simon and Schuster, 2003)

A moving autobiographical account of three generations of women in a Chinese family.

*Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China* by Peter Hessler (Harper Perennial, 2006)

An insight into China's rapid economic and cultural changes through the stories of several individuals.

*River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze* by Peter Hessler (Harper Perennial, 2001)

Hessler's autobiographical story of his experience as a foreign English teacher with the Peace Corps in Fuling, a city on the Yangtze River.

*Leaving Mother Lake: A Girlhood at the Edge of the World* by Yang Erche Namu

A great introduction to one of China's ethnic minority groups, which is matriarchal, and the story of a woman growing up on the Chinese-Tibetan border.

*Serve the People* by Jen Lin-Liu (Harcourt, 2008)

A memoir based on Lin-Liu's experience moving to China to learn how to cook. After working as a journalist, Lin-Liu moved to Shanghai and Beijing to attend local cooking schools and to explore her Chinese-American heritage.

*Red Azalea* by Anchee Min (Anchor Books, 2006)

Anchee Min's account of her life growing up in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution. After having to work as a Red Guard and on a farm to experience peasant life, Min was chosen to be in the propaganda film *Red Azalea*.

*Foreign Babes in Beijing: Behind the Scenes of a New China* by Rachel DeWoskin (W.W. Norton, 2006)

In 1989 DeWoskin moved to Beijing to work as a PR consultant. On a whim she auditioned and was chosen for a role as an American in a Chinese television drama. She describes her experience as a rising Chinese television star and her thoughts on the loss of traditional Chinese culture.

*Iron and Silk* by Mark Salzman (Vintage, 1987)

An entertaining memoir detailing Salzman's two-year stint as an English teacher in Changsha, a city in central China during the 1980s.

*Life and Death in Shanghai* by Nien Cheng (Penguin, 1988)

A riveting account of a woman's experience during the Cultural Revolution. Her house was looted by the Red Guards, sent to prison for over six years for refusing to confess to espionage, and still manages to survive.

*Red China Blues: My Long March from Mao to Now* by Jan Wong (Anchor, 1997)

An interesting account of a Chinese-Canadian woman's voluntary time in the Red Guard and her experience as a journalist during Tiananmen Square.

*Encounters with Qi* by David Eisenberg (W.W. Norton, 1995)

The story of the first U.S. medical student to do a residency at a Chinese traditional hospital.

#### Famous Chinese Texts:

*The Analects of Confucius*

A record of words and sayings of the most famous and influential Chinese philosopher.

*The Art of War* by Sun Tzu

A military text written during the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. exploring tactics of warfare. It has since had a tremendous impact on military thinking and strategy.

*The I Ching*

Also known as *Classic of Changes*, this is one of the world's oldest books, written over 3,000 years ago. Confucianism and Taoism both have roots in this text.

*Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*

Also known as "the little red book," this text contains quotations and speeches from Chairman Mao Zedong. During the Cultural Revolution, between 5 and 6.5 million copies were published and distributed to influence the Chinese population.

*China's Great Leap: The Beijing Games and Olympian Human Rights Challenges* edited by Minky Worden (Seven Stories Press 2008)

A very recent anthology with famous experts in many fields outlining China's human rights challenges in light of the Olympics.

*Wild Grass: Three Portraits of Change in Modern China* by Ian Johnson (Pantheon Books, 2004)

Three vignettes about controversial issues in China today and what they say about the state of the Chinese government and society.

### **News and Magazine Articles:**

“Angry Youth.” Evan Osnos (*New York Magazine*, July 28, 2008)

[www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/07/28/080728fa\\_fact\\_osnos](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/07/28/080728fa_fact_osnos)

This article explores the nature of patriotism in Chinese youth in light of preparation for the Olympics and frustration with protests about human rights issues.

“Crazy English.” Evan Osnos (*New York Magazine*, April 28, 2008)

[www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/04/28/080428fa\\_fact\\_osnos](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/04/28/080428fa_fact_osnos)

Osnos delves into Crazy English, one of the most successful English language learning companies in China. He considers why it is so successful, what approach it uses, and what Chinese people think about learning English.

The *New York Times* series “Choking on Growth” from 2007-2008

[www.nytimes.com/interactive/2007/08/26/world/asia/choking\\_on\\_growth.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2007/08/26/world/asia/choking_on_growth.html)

A series outlining the environmental effects of China’s rapid push for development.

“In China’s New Revolution, Art Greets Capitalism.” David Barboza (*New York Times*, January 4, 2007)

[www.nytimes.com/2007/01/04/arts/design/04arti.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/04/arts/design/04arti.html)

A great introduction to the rising tide of modern Chinese art and how capitalism and new wealth has played a role in stimulating the production of art.

“The Educated Giant.” Nicholas Kristof (*New York Times*, May 28, 2007)

<http://select.nytimes.com/2007/05/28/opinion/28kristof.html?ex=1180584000&en=9af79c6dfc2ee3ed&ei=5121&emc=eta1>

Excellent analysis of the shrinking educational gap between China and the United States and why it may mean China could surpass the United States as a world superpower.

“China Tries to Solve its Brand X Blues.” Joe Nocera (*New York Times*, April 12, 2008)

[www.nytimes.com/2008/04/12/business/worldbusiness/12nocera.html?scp=2&sq=china+brand+shaq&st=nyt](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/12/business/worldbusiness/12nocera.html?scp=2&sq=china+brand+shaq&st=nyt)

An exploration of how China looks at branding and making its products competitive in the world market.

The *National Geographic* May 2008 issue’s “China’s Journey” articles

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/05/table-of-contents>

A series of articles with excellent photography moving through topics including Beijing’s preparation for the Olympics, the rise of the middle class in China, and environmental challenges.

### **Films:**

*The Last Emperor* (1987)

A riveting film exploring the life of Puyi, the last Chinese emperor, including his interactions with his English tutor, played by Peter O’Toole.

*Kung Fu Hustle* (2004)

A martial arts comedy film which parodies traditional martial arts movies. It follows the story of a city’s most powerful gang and includes excellent music and cinematography.

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000)

A film by famous director An Lee. Set in the Qing Dynasty, it is a traditional-style martial arts film with beautiful images. The story follows two martial arts experts who are searching for a stolen sword and a dangerous fugitive.

*Hero* (2003)

Directed by the famous Zhang Yimou. Set in ancient China, a minor official kills three enemies who planned to assassinate the powerful ruler Qin and comes to the palace to tell his story.

*Farewell My Concubine* (1993)

The story of two actors in the Beijing Opera who both fall in love with the same woman. This movie also explores 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese politics.

*Infernal Affairs I, II, and III* (2002, 2003, 2003)

The movies which formed the basis for *The Departed*, these three films follow the story of a police officer who infiltrates a crime gang and a member of the gang who is also a spy for the police. This became an incredibly successful Hong Kong film.

*Big Shot's Funeral* (2001)

A comedy which makes fun of the role of capitalism in modern Chinese society. In the film, an American director on location in Beijing falls ill after his film isn't coming together. He asks one of the cameramen to plan a "comedy funeral" for him in Beijing, including performers and glitzy effects. To pay for the funeral, they set up sponsorships and ads, but then the director's health begins to improve.

*The Painted Veil* (2006)

A love story in the 1920s about a British doctor and his wife who move to Shanghai for his job. After the wife Kitty has an affair, the doctor volunteers to move them both to a rural area in central China to fight a cholera epidemic. This movie is great to get a sense of the high life of Shanghai in the 1920s.

*Beijing Bicycle* (2001)

A story about a boy from the countryside who moves to Beijing. His bicycle is stolen and then another teenager purchases it from a used bike store. The two meet and through the ensuing fight about the bicycle highlights many issues about migrant labor and life in Beijing.

*Raise the Red Lantern* (1992)

Also by Zhang Yimou, this story is set in China in the 1920s. Nineteen year old Songlian is forced to marry a 55 year old lord in a powerful family and become his fourth wife. This movie follows the lives of Chinese aristocrats in the 1920s and the drama that ensues between the four wives.

*Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994)

Also written and directed by An Lee, this movie is set in Taipei. The story revolves around a family living in a house consisting of a Master Chef father and three unmarried daughters and follows the love lives of all the family members.

*Suzhou River* (2000)

A riff on Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, this mystery is set in modern Shanghai; the river that flows through the city is filthy and poverty-stricken, but also a place of redemption, memories, secrets and love.

*Unknown Pleasures* (2002)

Indy film follows two unemployed slackers without job prospects or motivation, hanging out in a provincial town in China trying to make sense of their aimless and uncertain futures

*Kundun* (1997)

An excellent and beautifully-shot movie detailing the life of the current Dalai Lama and the situation in Tibet.

*Seven Years in Tibet* (1997)

The true story of Austrian mountain climber Heinrich Harrer who befriended the Dalai Lama during the time of China's takeover of Tibet.