

**China Maymester 2008**  
**Course Requirements**  
**POLS 4780: Cultural and Social Institutions in China**

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10% of grade

**Participation in all scheduled activities.** Without exception you are expected to attend and participate in all lectures, meetings and events. Please remember that you represent UGA and you are being judged by those you meet as representative of UGA. You have stereotypes and they have stereotypes as well. You may well be the first UGAer and may even first USAer that some people you meet will have ever met. Keep that in mind!

30% of grade

**Daily journal.**

Each student will be required to purchase and make daily entries into a journal. The journal entries should be creative in nature and record details that are experiential, those things that the students participates in actively (meetings, interviews, lectures, conversations, etc.). Passive reflection is appropriate but should not dominate journal entries.

The journal could contain some elements of each of the following:

- daily log of activities
- summary of daily meeting/briefing/lecture/observation
- questions/comments you have about meetings/briefings/lectures/observation
- your ongoing assessment of the problems/issues confronting China and your perceptions of the country, its culture and institutions, and its people and its opportunities and challenges
- you should include some comments you have gleaned from questions/answers to presenters and from informal interviews with Chinese you meet. You should try to interview someone each day. Include in your interview notes something about the interviewee (age, occupation, etc.). These interviews are to assist you in understanding the consequences of the social, economic, and political changes happening from the perspective of Chinese who are living it everyday.

**The instructor will collect and review your journals on June 3, 2008.**

60% of grade

**Final report**

Each student will be required to prepare a final paper of approximately 25 pages, due by June 29, 2008 (the report can be submitted to [wang@cviog.uga.edu](mailto:wang@cviog.uga.edu) or delivered in

person to my office). Based on your experiences and readings, the paper should address one of the following sets of questions:

1. What impression did you take into China, as a stereotype of Chinese culture and social institutions, that has mostly changed as a consequence of this study abroad experience? Why did you have this impression and why did it change? How do you view China now as a consequence of this study abroad experience? Are your answers consistent with the theoretical and empirical expectations generated by the literature you have read?
2. Are there any comparable social institutions and cultural practices between China and the US? Why or why not? What elements of Chinese culture do you find most interesting and why? How are Chinese social institutions similar and how are they different from US social institutions? Are your answers consistent with the theoretical and empirical expectations generated by the literature you have read?
3. How do you think China's current economic growth is most changing Chinese culture and social institutions? Are the changes you see for the better or for the worse? Will these changes result in China becoming more "Western" and if so do you see China becoming more "Western"? Are your answers consistent with the theoretical and empirical expectations generated by the literature you have read?
4. What do you see as China's future? Imagine ten year from now and describe how Chinese cultural and social institutions will evolve? What will China look like in the year 2018? Describe a day in the life of a Chinese student in 2018. Are your answers consistent with the theoretical and empirical expectations generated by the literature you have read?

Your grade can be positively influenced by photos, interviews, documents, and anything else that shows you actually put some work into your answer.

### **Some background on culture and institutions**

*Culture* can be defined as the system of shared values and meanings of a group or society, including the embodiment of those values and meanings in material artifacts. In no small measure, culture is your "blueprint for living." Culture is learned and not innate. Stop and think about things like means; greetings; attitudes about time; value of work and especially hard works; conversation and protocols in meetings and classrooms; how we think about science; attitudes about technology; the ideology of democracy and democratic values; how our cities are designed; what tools we use and how we use them; attitudes about sex roles and gender; family relations; meeting someone new; daily routines you have; language and how language is used; dress; formality and informality; how your home is designed and laid out; cars we drive; behavior in waiting rooms and elevators; etc. all these things reflect our cultural and our patterns of living and interacting with each other; think about all these things and then think about what you will see and experience in China.

The most important norms (culture rules) in a society are those which are institutionalized. An *Institution* is defined as a formal and stable way of pursuing an activity that is important to the society. The family, for example, is an institution; it is the accepted way to pursue the important activities of sex, the rearing of children, and

economic achievement. Other institutions help to regulation and patterns courtship, political use of power, and education of young and old. Institutions include social (such as voluntary organizations and the elements that make up civil society); political (governments and the rule of law); economic (the elements of the market economy); and religious (church and mortal values associated with religion). Institutions are the important elements of society that allow us to function and interact within our normative structures...so that we can understand each other and trust each other. In sum, to know what to expect from each other or interactions with each other and what behaviors are appropriate and what behaviors are not appropriate.

Norms are the rules, or standards, by which we live our daily lives. Institutions are essentially made up of norms, or social guidelines about what ought and ought not to be done in regard to important activities. Norms which are highly institutionalized become formal laws. Social institutions are the broadest organizers of individuals' beliefs, drives, and behaviors. Institutions evolve to address the separate needs of society (e.g., the government institutions out of the need for law and social control; the family out of the social needs for procreation, socialization, and intimacy), social institutions are free-standing social units with their own inner dynamics and rhythms. The more powerful a given institution is in any given society, the more likely its times influence everyday life.