

COLUMBIA GSAPP -- SPRING 2018 / A4390

GREATS: China's BIG Projects 1949-1980

409 Avery, 3 pts / W 11:00 am – 1:00pm

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The quest for an architecture both modern and Chinese has been going on for significantly more than a hundred years. In the early part of the last century a desire for this kind of language of building, one that could both reflect progress and be place specific, was a common puzzler world over. But in China, the quest started early and continues to this day, running parallel with changing ideas of “China”—the place and nation, concepts radically reconstrued at least four times in the course of the same period.

This seminar proposes to investigate one such time signature. The course focuses on the large scale experiments in new Chinese “building” run under the gaze of Mao Zedong from the decade preceding the 1949 inauguration of the People’s Republic of China through Mao’s death in 1976. Over this roughly 40-year time span, many sites and fundamental notions of daily life—language, expression, family, education, countryside and city--were redefined and radically tested. The mass campaigns used to inculcate such new conceptions represented often sharply distinct—sometimes opposed-- mindsets but through all of them, fundamental Chinese “sites” and the structure of China itself were starkly reimaged.

The first four weeks of the seminar will introduce the traditional organizational structures and habits of thought embedded in the targeted sites. This grounding will be combined with an introduction to the deep resources of Columbia’s research collections. And over the balance of the semester, primary resources from these collections and assigned readings will be used to explore the particular “experiments” in modern China building and the qualities of “new” and other discourses that the campaigns of Mao’s China represented.