

# Institute for Chinese Studies Lecture Series

## Minor Ornaments: Alternate Modernism and Race in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Art

2020-2021

ICS  
LECTURE  
SERIES

Friday, October 16

4:00-5:30 pm

Online



## Christine Ho

History of Art and Architecture

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Twentieth-century Euramerican critics often described the painting of Asian artists as “decorative,” implying a facility with superficial beauty at the expense of conceptual depth. What happened, then, when artists in modern China embraced this pejorative phrase as the defining feature of their art? This talk explores the polymathic designer, publisher, and cartoonist Zhang Guangyu’s vision for the potential of the decorative, and his negotiation of the paradox of race and culture in making of alternate modernism in modern China. Was it possible to imagine that the decorative could transcend modernism’s nationalist discourses through its language of abstracted symbols and mutual borrowing across cultures to upturn narratives of progress and innovation? Or did decoration remain entrapped within the racialized, and racist, paradigms of the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, and folk studies?

**Christine I. Ho** is associate professor of East Asian art history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research focuses on modern and contemporary art in China. She is currently working on two projects: a study of the mural in modern China, and a monograph on the theory, history, and practice of collective production in modern and contemporary Chinese art, entitled *Collective Brushwork*.



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