

ASIA 2605: Romancing the Nation in Modern Chinese Literature

TR 11:00-12:15 Buttrick Hall 309

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Office Hours: Tue 2:30-4:30pm and by appointment; Buttrick Hall 260

(Prior knowledge of Chinese language or literature is NOT required)



The White Haired Girl (1965)— model opera during the Cultural Revolution

Course Description:

Romance is not always romantic. It could involve feelings of loss, longing, hatred, and nostalgia. Romance is not necessarily between persons. It could be the way one imagines oneself in relation to the society and the nation one belongs to. When China transformed from a pre-modern empire to a modern nation-state (19th-20th centuries), it faced internal rebellions, foreign invasions, and radical changes in family and society. How did people live and love through these centuries of unprecedented turmoil? How did these experiences shape the lifestyles in today's China? We will together explore some of the answers to these questions.

With “romancing the nation,” I refer to the ways in which Chinese people understood their past, imagined their future, and reflected on their personal lives through literary writing. Romantic love will be a major theme in most of the readings, and we will read these texts against the shifting structure in family and the nation state. Readings start with classical dramas and novels, move on to the “new literature” in the 20th century, and end with contemporary writings in the socialist China. Topics include the contrast between traditional and modern romance, ethnic conflicts, gender, revolution, and the wasted youth.

Through this course, you will 1) have a more complex understanding of “romance,” especially Chinese romantic writing in comparison with that in the West; 2) gain a firm grasp of the main themes and genres of modern Chinese literature as shaped by both traditional Chinese and Western literatures; 3) better understand modern China with its familial and social transformations; and 4) learn to engage with literary texts closely and critically.

This is one of the two entry-level courses of introduction to Chinese literature (the other one, titled “Self and Society in Pre-modern Chinese Literature,” is offered every fall semester). It prepares you for more advanced studies of Chinese literature and culture. Class meetings include a 10-minute student presentation, a 30-minute lecture, and a 35-minute discussion. All readings are in English. Class is taught in English. If you are native in Chinese, you are allowed to read the original texts in Chinese (I will provide them upon request). However, you are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the English translation to the extent that you can adequately participate in online and in-class discussion. Discussion must be in English.

Required Texts:

- 1) Weekly readings will be posted on Blackboard. I encourage you to have it printed and bring it to every class meeting.
- 2) Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone*, Penguin Classics, 1974, vol.1.
- 3) Kong Shangren, *The Peach Blossom Fan*, NYRB Classics, 2015.

Requirements:

- 1) Class Participation: All weekly readings are due before class. We will frequently refer to the texts in class, so you should bring the readings to class, in electronic or printed forms. Active participation in class discussion is very important. Please come to class with questions and opinions about the readings.
- 2) Online Posting: By the midnight before the day of class meeting, submit a post in the discussion section on Blackboard. Your post must be one of three types: a question about a problem in the primary readings (specify page numbers or sentences) and a tentative answer; a clarification question about difficult or confusing parts of the primary texts (explain why they difficult to understand); response to other students' posts. You must post for at least 15 class meetings to

- receive participation credits. At least 8 posts have to be in the first type. (samples provided in class)
- 3) Written requirements include two papers (4-5 pages each). Your paper can be a close reading (cite and engage closely with passages from the original texts), a research paper (cite at least 2 secondary studies, relate to larger topics discussed in class), or a combination. In both papers, you can either focus on one author or trace a theme in 2-3 authors. Papers will be graded on originality, compelling argumentation, and clarity of style. I will provide rubrics for paper writing. Brief paper proposals are due online at different dates (see class schedule, proposals are not graded). I will provide feedback and suggestions on your proposal if I think it's necessary. Late papers are NOT accepted. If you need an extension, please contact me in advance. Extensions are given with higher expectation of quality.
 - 4) The midterm exam includes identifications and short essays. Identifications will involve main passages discussed in class. Your class participation (esp. attention) will be essential for the exam.
 - 5) Presentation includes two parts: an individual presentation and a group work of leading class discussion. In the individual presentation you can talk about an author's biography, connect that with his/her works, and respond to possible questions from the class. In the group presentation, you will work in groups of 3 to lead a discussion session of about 30 minutes. Presentations are graded by preparedness, structure, and deliverance. Please sign up and choose a date for presentation early in the semester. See more instructions on the sign-up sheet in Blackboard.
 - 6) You will be allowed two unexcused absences for the semester. Beyond that, you will need to contact me in advance and provide verifiable excuses to avoid losing grade. If the scheduled exam dates conflict with your religious holiday or your participation in Vanderbilt athletics or other activities, you should talk with me well in advance to schedule an alternative exam date.
 - 7) Computer Policy: Electronic devices (computers and phones) are allowed in class ONLY for reading, note taking, and other purposes as instructed. Non-class-related activities such as texting and web-surfing are prohibited.

NB: Instead of the two short papers, graduate and professional school students will write a 15-20-page research paper or a critical book review. There will also be additional secondary readings based on your specific interests. All the other requirements and grading scheme apply to graduate students.

Grading:

Presentation: 10% (5% for individual presentation and 5% for group work)

Online posting: 10% (based on both quantity and quality of your posts)

In-class participation: 15% (attendance, attention, communication, and respect for others)

Midterm in-class exam: 25%

Papers: 20% \times 2=40% (graduate students: research paper 40%)

NB: I do not have a grading curve in this course. Your final grade will reflect the overall quality of your work, your participation, and your growth.

You will receive an A if you 1) attend class meetings as required, actively participate in discussions both in class and online; 2) complete all assignments on time, demonstrate considerable thoughts, efforts, and innovation in your works; 3) respect and collaborate with your fellow students in discussion and group work, make major contributions.

You will receive a B if you 1) attend class meetings as required, participate in discussions; 2) complete all assignments on time, demonstrate thoughts and efforts; 3) respect and collaborate with your fellow students in discussion and group work.

Honor Code: The Vanderbilt Honor Code governs all work done in this class. For more information, visit <http://www.owen.vanderbilt.edu/about-us/honor-code.cfm>

Class Schedule and Readings: (readings with an asterisk [*] are optional)

1/12 Introduction: Romance, family, and the nation in modern Chinese literature
Read the syllabus carefully (print copies available in class)

Part I The Early Modern Sentimentality (17th-20th centuries)

In the 17th-18th centuries, China entered its last dynasty, one ruled by the Manchu minority people. It saw the last splendor of the imperial China as well as signs of its debunking. In this section, we focus on a drama and a novel to get familiar with the ways of writing romance in pre-modern China, so that you can see how modern writings departed from these models.

1/14 A Drama of National and Personal Trauma (1)

The Peach Blossom Fan, “Preface” xvii-xxii; Prologue, Scenes 3, 8, 13-16, 35

1/19 A Drama of National and Personal Trauma (2)

The Peach Blossom Fan, Scenes 5-7, 22-25

1/21 A Drama of National and Personal Trauma (3)

The Peach Blossom Fan, Scenes 36-40

1/26 The Remnant Splendor of the Imperial China (1)

The Story of the Stone, romance Chaps. 1, 5, 12, 23

1/28 The Remnant Splendor of the Imperial China (2)

The Story of the Stone, family and state, Chaps. 3, 14, 18

Part II Modern Country, Modern Love (1919-1949)

Through the first decades of the 20th century, China went through the collapse of its last dynasty, the two world wars, and most importantly, the modernization of Chinese

language and literature under the influences from Japan and the West. In this section, we look at how Chinese writers, both men and women, responded to and represented these changes.

Writing the Nation and the People

- 2/2 The criticism of traditional China in Lu Xun's writings
 Preface to "Call to Arms", "A Madman's Diary", "Kung I-chi", "Medicine" (PDF Lu Xun 1)
- 2/4 Rural landscape and rural people in Lu Xun's writings
 "My Old Home", "Village Opera", "The New Year's Sacrifice" (PDF Lu Xun 2)
- 2/9 Writing the Folks in Southwest China (1)
 PDF Shen Congwen 1
- 2/11 Writing the Folks in Southwest China (2)
 PDF Shen Congwen 2
First paper proposal due online (post it on Blackboard by midnight)

Modern Romance in Poetic Voices

- 2/16 Selected poems: Xu Zhimo, Dai Wangshu, He Qifang
 PDF: Selected poems 1
 * Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (PDF Lee, The Romantic Generation)
- 2/18 Selected poems: Wen Yiduo, Ai Qing, Mao Zedong
 PDF: Selected poems 2
First paper due (midnight, submit on Blackboard in Word files)

Lost Nation and Lost Men/Women

- 2/23 A Love Affair in Japan
 PDF Yu Dafu, "Sinking"
 * Kirk Denton, "The Distant Shore: Nationalism in Yu Dafu's 'Sinking'", *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 14 (Dec. 1992), 107-23. (PDF Denton, The Distant Shore)
- 2/25 A Romance in Hong Kong
 PDF Eileen Chang, *Love in a Fallen City*
- 3/1 **Film** John Woo, *The Crossing* (2014)

3/3 Mid-term exam**3/5-3/13 Spring Break****Transition: The Old and The New**3/15 Ba Jin, *The Family* (1)PDF Ba Jin, *The Family* (excerpts 2 [pp. 8-15], 4 [p. 18], 7 [pp. 26-32])PDF Intro to Ba Jin's *Family* (pp. 411-413)3/17 Ba Jin, *The Family* (2)PDF Ba Jin, *The Family* (excerpts 1, 3, 5, 6)**Part III Socialist (and Post-socialist) China (1949-present)**

As state ideology, communism significantly influenced people's emotional life and literary writing in the second half of the 20th century. It promised a utopia, produced hope, and left scars in the hearts of several generations of youth. How have Chinese people lived through and reflected over these experiences? Modern China is in the present tense.

Art for/as Revolution

3/22 Marriage for the Nation

PDF Zhao Shuli, "The Marriage of Young Blacky" (aka "Little Erhei's Marriage")

PDF Mao Zedong on literature

3/24 *Song of Youth* (excerpt)PDF *Song of Youth*PDF Intro to *Song of Youth* (pp. 472-73)

3/29 The Cultural Revolution Model Theater

PDF Intro to Model Theater

Ballet: "The White-Haired Girl" (watch by yourself before class:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ug-fhwXDMko>)3/31 **Film** Chen Kaige, *Yellow Earth* (1984)

(no class meeting; watch film by yourself; follow instruction in

Discussion/Blackboard and submit a post of at least 200 words;

(Part 1 of film here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfHx92LFaNo> you can easily find Part 2 on Youtube)**Post-socialist Writing**

4/5 Misty Poetry

PDF Misty Poetry

PDF Intro to Misty Poetry

4/7 Scar Literature

PDF The Class Teacher

PDF Intro to Scar Literature

4/12 Beijing in 1989

PDF Selected Readings about June Fourth

Second paper proposal due online (post it on Blackboard by midnight)

4/14 How to Win Nobel Prize of Literature

PDF Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum*

PDF Intro to Mo Yan and Red Sorghum

4/19 Root-seeking literature

PDF Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum*

* PDF Intro to Root-seeking Literature

4/21 Review and Discussion (no additional reading)

Second paper due (midnight, submit on Blackboard in Word files)

(Class schedule and readings are subject to changes)