

ASIA 2606: The Martial Tradition in Chinese Literature

TR 1:10-2:25 Calhoun Hall 320

Prof. Guojun Wang (guojun.wang@vanderbilt.edu)

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

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



Course Description:

We usually say that the Chinese tradition comprises a civil and a martial component. The civil refers to civilization, writing, and literature. What, then, is China's martial tradition? In addition to martial arts, the martial also includes such practices as war, revenge, assassination, banditry, and occasionally gender performance. At the heart of these practices lies the legitimate use of violence. What legitimizes violence? What turns killing into chivalry? And ultimately, how should we understand the apparently transparent word—"martial"? The best way to answer these questions is to examine some

of the commonly understood martial practices in Chinese literature, theater, and—in the modern era—film.

This course focuses on a series of themes from the philosophy of war to martial arts through Chinese history. Through this course, you will 1) be familiar with some genres of Chinese literature such as novel and drama; 2) understand the many facets that constitute China's martial tradition; and 3) be able to ascertain and critique the strategies of justifying violence.

Course materials include literary texts and a few films. Class meetings comprise a 10-minute student presentation, a 30-minute lecture, and a 35-minute discussion. In addition to a midterm paper and a final paper, you also need to participate actively in online and in-class discussions (see requirements). All readings are in English. Class is taught in English.

Required Texts:

- 1) Luo Guanzhong, *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel* (translated by Moss Roberts, University of California Press, 2014).
- 2) Other readings will be made available as PDF files.
- 3) Films will be uploaded to Blackboard for screening.

Requirements:

- 1) 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. One of the two papers can be a film review. The review should include some discussion about the related literary texts (it should NOT be about cinematography alone).
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.
- 2) Class Participation: All weekly readings are due before class. We will frequently refer to the texts in class, especially during the discussion, 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.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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 (submit a 1-page reflection on Blackboard afterwards). 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.
 - 5) 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.
 - 6) 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 take-home exam: 25%
Papers: 20%x2=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

Read the syllabus carefully (print copies available in class)

In-class viewing: 2008 Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony; China's 2015 Victory Day Parade

Writing War

In traditional China, the war was philosophy, ritual, art, a competition of strategy, and disaster for the individuals involved. We will study these different facets of war in poems, essays, and a classical novel.

1/14 War as philosophy

PDF *The Arts of War* (excerpts);

PDF Other early writings on war

1/19 War in historical writing

Selections from Sima Qian, *Historical Records* (PDF War in Historical Records)

1/21 *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* (1)

Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel, Guan Yu, chaps. 1, 25, 26, 27, 76

* Jiyuan Yu: "The Notion of Appropriateness (*Yi*) in *Three Kingdoms*," *Three Kingdoms and Chinese Culture*, pp. 27-40. (PDF The Notion of Appropriateness)

1/26 *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* (2)

Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel, Zhuge Liang, chaps. 37, 38, 44, 46, 49

* Kimberly Besio: "Zhuge Liang and Zhang Fei: *Bowang Shao Tun* and Competing Masculine Ideals within the Development of the Three Kingdoms Story Cycle," pp. 73-86. (PDF Zhuge Liang and Zhang Fei)

1/28 *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* (3)

Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel, Cao Cao, chaps. 4, 21, 30, 48, 50

Revenge and Assassination

Should one seek revenge? How should the state deal with the circle of revenge? What are the rules for assassins? The stories in this section probe some of the moral dilemmas people coped with in traditional China.

2/2 Assassination in historical narratives

"The Biographies of the Assassin-retainers (excerpt)," from Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian* (PDF Sima Qian, Assassin-retainers; note that the two parts of one piece are translated separately)

2/4 Revenge on stage

Yuan drama *The Orphan of Zhao* (PDF *The Orphan of Zhao*)

2/9 The dilemma of revenge

Debates on filial revenge in the Tang dynasty (8th century) (PDF Tang debate on revenge)

On revenge against the Manchu rulers in late Qing China (19th century) (PDF Zhang Taiyan on revenge)

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

2/11 Assassination on screen

Film 1: Chen Kaige, *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1998)

2/16 Review and discussion (no additional reading)

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

Heroes or Bandits?

*The 108 outlaws in *The Water Margin* (including 3 women) are paragons of the loyal and righteous bandits in Chinese literature. They are depicted simultaneously as heroes and villains. How can cannibalistic thieves be heroes? What is the logic and mentality behind the praise of them?*

2/18 *Outlaws of the Marsh*, part 1

2/23 *Outlaws of the Marsh*, part 2

2/25 *Outlaws of the Marsh*, part 3

3/1 Outlaws of the Marsh on stage

In-class screening: drama performance about Wu Song and Lu Zhishen

* **Film 2** Shaw Brothers, *The Water Margin* (1972)

3/3 Review and discussion (no additional reading)

Take-home exam due

3/5-3/13 Spring Break

Female Knight-errant

Is a knight-errant necessarily a man? What do stories of female knight-errant tell about masculinity? This group of stories reveals the gender dimension of China's martial tradition.

3/15 Female knight-errant in classical tales (Tang dynasty)

PDF Tang tales (7th-9th centuries)

- 3/17 Female knight-errant in classical tales (Qing dynasty)
Strange Tales from Liaozhai (17th -18th centuries): “Nie Xiaoqian,” “The Swordswoman” (PDF *Strange Tales from Liaozhai*)
- 3/22 Female revolutionaries in modern China (20th century)
 “The Beheaded Feminist: Qiu Jin” (PDF Qiu Jin)
 * Another female assassin in modern China (PDF Shi Jianqiao)
- 3/24 **Film 3:** King Hu, *A Touch of Zen*, (1971) (watch before class, discuss in class)
Screening: 3/23 Buttrick 015 (basement)

Martial Arts: Past to Present

Chinese martial arts are not simply in the films of Bruce Lee. Through Chinese history, martial arts were tied to religion and the fate of the nation. In the last two sections, we explore different representations of Chinese martial arts in films and contemporary novels.

- 3/29 Shaolin: the monks that kill
 Meier Shahaar, *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts* (PDF Meier Shahaar, The Shaolin Monastery)
- 3/31 **Film** Lo Wei, *Fist of Fury (Jingwu men)* (1972) (no class, just watch film)
Screening: 3/30 7-9pm Buttrick 015 (basement)
- 4/5 Martial arts and nationalism
 Andrew D. Morris, “From Martial Arts to National Skills,” in *Marrow of the Nation* (PDF From Martial Arts to National Skills)
 Discussion of *Fist of Fury*
- 4/7 Martial arts and the Cultural Revolution
 Excerpts from *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (PDF *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*)
 In-class viewing: *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* (model opera during Cultural Revolution)
- 4/12 Jin Yong: Reinventing the martial arts tradition
 Jin Yong, *Legend of the Condor Heroes 1: A Hero Born*, part 1
 PDF Martial-arts fiction and Jin Yong
- 4/14 Jin Yong, *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, part 2
- 4/19 Jin Yong, *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, part 3
 Or, watch film Hu Guan, *Mr. Six* (2015)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dn_sSqTf4zc

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)