

ASIA 2605: Romancing the Nation in Modern Chinese Literature

TR 9:35–10:50 Cohen 324

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

Office Hours: T 1:15–3:15 Buttrick 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 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 those 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 span the late 19th century through the current day and include works written inside and outside Mainland China. Topics include family, 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 usually include a student presentation, a short lecture, and discussion. All readings are in English. Class is taught in English.

Texts

- 1) Lu Hsun. *Selected Stories*. Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang; with an introduction by Ha Jin. Norton Library, 2003. ISBN: 9780393008487. Available at VU bookstore and Amazon.
- 2) Other readings will be posted on Brightspace. Please bring print or e-copies to every class meeting.
- 3) You may read the original texts in Chinese. 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.

Requirements

- 1) Class Participation: All weekly readings are due before class. We will frequently refer to the texts in class. Active participation in class discussion is very important. Please come to class with questions and opinions about the readings.
- 2) Online Posting: 10 posts minimum for at least 10 weeks. Submit post by midnight before class meeting. 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 are difficult to understand); response to other students’ posts. Prepare to talk about at least 1 of your posts in class.
- 3) TWO in-class quizzes include identifications and short essays. Identifications will involve main passages discussed in class. Your class participation (esp. attention) will be essential for the quizzes. If the scheduled quiz 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 date.

- 4) Presentation: You will work in groups to do presentation and lead a discussion session on assigned topics.
- 5) Final project: You will work in groups on a public exhibition project on a topic of your choice.
- 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: Graduate and professional school students will write a 20-25-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:

	A	94-100
Individual work:	A-	90-93
Online Posting: 15%	B+	87-89
In-class participation: 15%	B	84-86
Quizzes 20%	B-	80-83
Group work:	C+	77-79
Presentation and leading discussion: 20%	C	74-76
Final project 30%	C-	70-73
	D	60-69
	F	0-60

NB: Your final grade will be based on the overall quality of your work, participation, and evaluation by your teammates.

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.

Lower grades will be given for performance below above descriptions.

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)

1/8 Introduction: Read the syllabus carefully

I Toward a New China

- 1/10 From the Qing dynasty to Republican China
 PDF China's Modern History (4 pages)
 PDF "Historical Overview" (pp. 287-290)
 PDF Liang Qichao, "Renewing the People"
 PDF Lin Juemin, "Last Letter to His Wife"

1/15 Screening (no class meeting): *Carved In Silence: Inside Angel Island Immigration Station*

<https://www.kanopy.com/product/carved-silence>

- 1/17 Chinese in America: a century apart
Island: poetry and history of Chinese immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940
 (excerpts, PDF Island Poetry)
 Vanessa Fong, *Paradise Redefined*, "Introduction" (PDF Fong, Paradise Redefined Intro)

II Writing the Nation and the People

- 1/22 New Culture Movement and May Fourth Movement
 PDF "Historical Overview" (pp. 290-299)
 PDF Writings on Literary Reform
 Topic: The May Fourth spirit in contemporary China
- 1/24 The criticism of traditional China in Lu Xun's writings
 Preface to "Call to Arms", "A Madman's Diary", "Kung I-chi", "* Medicine"
- 1/29 Rural landscape and rural people in Lu Xun's writings
 "My Old Home", "The New Year's Sacrifice," "*Village Opera"
- 1/31 Lu Xun's Legacy
 Reading: Ha Jin, "Introduction" to *Selected Stories*
 Topic: Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang
 Topic: Lu Xun museum in China
 Keywords: "anti-feudalism" "The Zhao family" "Iron House" "Home"

III Lost Nation and Lost Men/Women

- 2/5 Writing the Folks in Southwest China
 PDF Shen Congwen
- 2/7 A Love Affair in Japan
 PDF Yu Dafu, "Sinking"

- * Kirk Denton, “The Distant Shore: Nationalism in Yu Dafu’s ‘Sinking’” (PDF Denton, *The Distant Shore*)
- 2/12 A Romance in Hong Kong
PDF Eileen Chang, *Love in a Fallen City*
- 2/14 Romance and Nation in Poetic Voices
PDF: Selected poems
* Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (PDF Lee, *The Romantic Generation*)
* PDF Introduction to New Poetry
- IV Art for Revolution**
- 2/19 Marriage for the Nation
PDF Mao Zedong on literature
PDF Zhao Shuli, “The Marriage of Young Blacky” (aka “Little Erhei’s Marriage”)
- 2/21 Experiences of the Cultural Revolution
PDF *Spider Eaters* (excerpt)
PDF *The Three-body Problem* (excerpt)
- 2/26 The Cultural Revolution Model Theater
PDF Intro to Model Theater
In-class screening: “The White-Haired Girl”
- 2/28 review and in-class quiz 1**
- 3/2-3/10 Spring Break**

V Post-socialist Writing (1978-present)

- 3/12 Misty Poetry
“Historical Overview” (pp. 299-304)
PDF Misty Poetry
PDF Intro to Misty Poetry
Introducing the final project
- 3/14 Beijing in 1989
Film: Lou Ye, *Summer Palace* 頤和園 (2006)
- 3/19 Selected Readings about June Fourth
- 3/21 Root-seeking literature
PDF Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum* (1)

PDF Intro to Mo Yan and Red Sorghum

3/26 PDF Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum* (2)

PDF Intro to Root-seeking Literature

3/28 Wasted Youth on the Assembly Line

Selected poems from *Iron Moon* (PDF Iron Moon)

VI Diasporic China

4/2 “I Am Chinese”—Taipei and Seattle

Pai Hsien-yung, selected stories from *Taipei People*

Compare with Jamie Ford, *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* (excerpt)

4/4 Yan Geling, selected stories from *White Snake and Other Stories*

4/9 The place(s) we call home

Ha Jin, *A Free Life* (excerpt)

Vanessa Fong, *Paradise redefined*, Ch. 6

4/11 **In-class quiz 2**

4/16 Discuss your final project

4/18 Final project presentation

4/20 Final project essays due at midnight

(Class schedule and readings are subject to changes)