

CET Syllabus of Record



Program: China Fieldwork Semester

Course Title: Chinese Literature in Translation

Course Code: LITR 152

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Literature / Film Studies, Asian Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description

How can encounter with place inform our reading of Chinese literature, and how can that literature in turn shape our understanding of place? This course gives students the opportunity to spend a semester reading literature that corresponds with discussions they are having *about* China while *in* China. Students explore Chinese literature spanning many genres and centuries as they participate in the China Fieldwork Semester program. The course reinforces studies in history and environmental science focusing on landscape and relationships with place. Students examine the ways in which history, memory, and identity are interwoven as authors represent “place” in China, from specific landscapes haunted by conflicts to constructed spaces that serve to establish social rules and values. Students have the opportunity to witness some of the places represented in the literature as well as the opportunity to consider the value and conceptual construction of place in depth.

Objectives

Through this course, students learn to:

- Connect their study of literature with local history and landscape, and with their own experiences of place
- Appreciate the foundations of Chinese philosophy and literature, the art of storytelling, and literary value of biography and everyday life
- Analyze and discuss in seminar format recurring themes in Chinese literature and the inscription of those literary themes in vernacular architecture, popular religion, workplaces, and lived experience
- Practice critical thinking in analytical essays and journal reflections, and creative writing in short biographical portraits of local people in Xizhou

Course Requirements

The course is taught as a discussion-based seminar but also incorporates experiential learning. One goal is to have students be able to process, synthesize, and express experiences of place—both in the texts and in the encounters they have with China. Students have the opportunity to lead class discussion and to write informal journal entries reflecting on their reading and experiences. They write three formal analytical essays: one on *Red Sorghum*, one on *Raise the Red Lantern*, and one on short stories by Lu Xun and Ba Jin that wrestle with modernity and

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modernism. Additionally, students apply the literary-journalistic techniques seen in *Corpsewalker* to produce a series of written portraits of local people in Xizhou.

Students are expected to read regularly (approximately 50 to 75 pages per week) and to participate actively in class discussions. Students are evaluated on their seminar participation, their informal writing, their formal essays, and their 3 – 5 page “local portraits” projects.

Methods of Evaluation

Students grades are formulated according to the following breakdown:

- Course Journal: 15%
- Participation (includes seminar discussion and fieldwork): 15%
- Three Analytical Papers: 45% (15% each paper)
- Final Local Portraits Project: 25%

Attendance

Attendance requirements are outlined the CET Attendance Policy.

Primary Texts

Mair, Victor, ed. *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Bary, William Theodore De, Irene Bloom, and Joseph Adler. *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Vol. 1*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Qiu Xiaolong. *100 Poems from Tang and Song Dynasties*. New York, NY: Better Link Press, 2006.

Feng Menglong. *Stories from a Ming Collection: The Art of the Chinese Storyteller*. Translated by Cyril Birch. New York: Grove Press, 1994.

Bordahl, Vibeke, and Jette Ross. *Chinese Storytellers: Life and Art in the Yangzhou Tradition*. Boston: Cheng & Tsui Co, 2002.

Su Tong. *Raise the Red Lantern: Three Novellas*. New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2004.

Lu Xun. *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*. Independently published, 2018.

Mo Yan. *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China*. Translated by Howard Goldblatt. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.

Liao Yiwu. *The Corpse Walker: Real Life Stories: China From the Bottom Up*. New York: Anchor, 2009.

Supplementary Texts

Other readings as assigned.

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The CFS Film series serves as a point of interdisciplinary connection among history, literature, and environmental studies. The films are assigned for discussion in all CFS core courses:

To Live (director Zhang Yimou, 1994)
Red Sorghum (director Zhang Yimou, 1987)
The Last Emperor (director Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987)
Blue Kite (director Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1993)
Farewell My Concubine (director Chen Kaige, 1992)
Up the Yangtze (director Yung Chang, 2009)
Old Dog (director Pema Tseden, 2011)
Tharlo (director Pema Tseden, 2015)

Outline of Course Content

The readings cover a range of works and authors, exploring literary works—from classical foundations to modernism to the ironic turn of contemporary fiction-- in connection to specific field sites. Our visits to these sites will enable us to make meaningful connections between place and literature.

Unit 1: **Place**

Classics and Foundations: We read the ancient classic, the *Book of Songs*, in the context of an agrarian society that still has a vibrant epic folksong tradition, as well as the foundations of Chinese philosophy and literature through the Daoist Classic, *Dao De Jing*, *The Analects* of Confucius, and the masters of Tang Dynasty poetry. In addition to reading and reflecting on these works-in-translation in journals and discussions, students will learn passages from these classics in the original Chinese in their language classes.

Unit 2: **Dwelling**

Architecture and power: We explore local historical changes in architecture as we read the Su Tong novella *Raise the Red Lantern* (and its film version, directed by Zhang Yimou, 1991), set in a traditional family compound. Students draw on fictional representations of space to reflect on the explicit and implicit meanings of the built environments (houses and fields) they study in Xizhou.

Unit 3: **Belief**

Chinese Modernism: Students encounter the popular religion tradition through the eyes of the early twentieth century iconoclast and ardent modernist Lu Xun, and the anarchist writer Ba Jin.

Unit 4: **Work**

Storytelling and Literature as Performance: In markets and temple opera stages, students will understand the social context of the rich story telling tradition that is the foundation of much of Chinese written literature.

Unit 5: **Diversity**

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Landscape and Identity: We explore senses of place and memory in rural China through Nobel Laureate Mo Yan's novel *Red Sorghum* and consider questions of ethnic identity, gender, and collective historical experience expressed in fiction.

Unit 6: **Modernity**

Modernization and irony: Students read and discuss Liao Yiwu's masterpiece of contemporary reportage in *The Corpse Walker: Real Life Stories: China from the Bottom Up* and emulate Liao's method of literary portraiture in their own creative accounts of individuals in the community of Xizhou. These accounts are based on interviews with people we partner with during any of the experiential projects over the semester: farmers, craftsmen, fishermen, shopkeepers, students, teachers—anyone who has a story the students want to tell.