

Modern Chinese Poetry in a Global Context

*Tang Taizong and Song Taizu
Had little poetry in their souls;
And Genghis Khan,
Proud Son of Heaven for a day,
Knew only shooting eagles, bow outstretched
All are past and gone!
For truly great figures
Look to this age alone.*

-Mao Zedong, "Snow" (1936)

Instructor

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I. Course Description

The tumultuous political and economic history of twentieth century China has been mirrored in and shaped by equally fundamental revolutions in language and poetic expression. In this course, we will take modern Chinese poetry as a crucible in which we can observe the interacting forces of literary history and social change. From diplomats who saw poetry as a medium for cultural translation between China and the world, to revolutionaries who enlisted poetry in the project of social transformation, we will examine the lives and works of some of China's most prominent poets and ask, what can we learn about modern China from reading their poetry? In asking this question, we will also reckon with the strengths and limitations of using poetry as an historical source. In addition to poems, the course will include fiction, essays, photographs, and films by both Chinese and non-Chinese artists that place our poets in a broader context. We will pay close attention to how these poets represent China's place in the world, as well as the role of language in social change. Topics of discussion include: national identity, revolution, translation, gender, the body, ethnicity, and technology.

Familiarity with Chinese or related cultural context is beneficial, but not required.

This course introduces students to modern Chinese poetry in English translation. Students will leave the course with an in-depth understanding of the main figures, themes, and techniques of modern Chinese poetry, and will be introduced to some of the major developments in the history of modern China. Through a focus on primary texts, students will develop the vocabulary and analytical skills to appreciate and analyze poetry in translation and will gain confidence as writers thinking about literary texts.

II. Readings

All readings will be provided through Courseworks—no purchases necessary. The course focuses on primary materials (i.e., original works of literature in English translation), with occasional supplemental readings to provide context, background, and additional grounds for discussion. Some secondary readings are optional, and are marked as such.

Session 1: Course Overview

(No readings)

Topics for Discussion: Introduction to the syllabus and to each other. Overview of Chinese poetry and its history before the modern period. Introduction to the basics of Chinese language. Discussion: what's modern about poetry?

Session 2: How do we read a translation?

Primary Source Reading:

Wang Wei, Elliot Weinberger, and Octavio Paz. *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* (New York: Moyer Bell Limited, 1987)

Secondary Reading:

Michelle Yeh, “‘There Are no Camels in the Koran’: What Is Modern about Modern Chinese Poetry?,” in *New Perspectives on Contemporary Chinese Poetry*, ed. Christopher Lupke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9-28

James J. Y. Liu. *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), ix-87

Topics for Discussion: translation, classicism, the natural world

Session 3: Huang Zunxian's San Francisco Poems: Racial politics and the Chinese Exclusion Act

Primary:

Within the Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian, 1848-1905 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) (selections)

Huang Zunxian, “Preface to Poems from the Hut in the Human World,” in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 69-71

***Sample syllabus, subject to revision

Secondary:

Tian Xiaofei, "Dialect Spoken by Green Fruit: An Alternative History of Modern Chinese Poetry," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 21, no. 1, (2009): 1-45

Topics for Discussion: modernity, diaspora, the other

Session 4: The Requiems of Qiu Jin and Anna Akhmatova: Women on the verge of a revolution

Primary:

Kang-I Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, ed., *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 632-655 (selections)

Anna Akhmatova. *Poems*. Trans., D.M. Thomas. (New York: Knopf, 2006) (selections)

Qiu Jin (1983) [film]

Lu Xun, "Medicine" in *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*, trans. Julia Lovell (New York: Penguin, 2009), 37-44

Secondary:

Peter Zarrow, "Ideas and ideas in the fall of the Qing" in *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 53-74

Anna Akhmatova and Nancy K. Anderson. *The Word that Causes Death's Defeat: Poems of Memory*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 3-115

Topics for Discussion: memory, mourning, comparative literature

Session 5: Vernacular poetry, language reform, and Esperanto in China

Primary:

Hu Shi, *The Big Red Book of Modern Chinese Literature: Writings from the Mainland*, ed. Yunte Huang (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016) (ebook) (selections)

***Sample syllabus, subject to revision

Hu Shi, "Some Modest Proposals for the Reform of Literature." In *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 123-139

Alexander Korzhenevich, *Zamenhof: The Life, Works, and Ideas of the Author of Esperanto*, trans. Ian M. Richmond (New York: Mondial, 2009), 1-45

Hu Shi, Unpublished diaries, 1921-1935. Microfilm in the archive of the Oral History Project, Columbia University (optional)

Secondary:

Gotelind Müller and Gregor Benton, "Esperanto and Chinese anarchism 1907-1920." *Language Problems & Language Planning* 30, no. 1 (2006), 45-73

Andrew Jones, "A Narrow Cage: Lu Xun, Eroshenko, and the Modern Chinese Fairy Tale" in *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011) 147-188

Lydia Liu, "The Problem of Language in Cross-Cultural Studies." In *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 1-44 (optional)

Topics for Discussion: utopia, anarchism, reform

Session 6: Ezra Pound, Charles Baudelaire, Rabindranath Tagore, and global modernisms

Primary:

Ernest Fenollosa. *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights, 1936)

Rabindranath Tagore. *Selected Poems*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004) (selections)

Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil*, ed. Marthiel and Jackson Mathews (New York: New Directions, 1955) (selections)

Secondary:

Gal Gvili, "Pan-Asian Poetics: Tagore and the Interpersonal in May Fourth New Poetry," *Journal of Asian Studies* 77, no. 1 (February 2018): 181-203.

***Sample syllabus, subject to revision

Haun Saussy, "Death and Translation." *Representations* 94 (Spring 2006): 112-130.

George A. Kennedy, "Fenollosa, Pound, and the Chinese Character." *Yale Literary Magazine* 126, no. 5 (1958): 24-36.
http://www.pinyin.info/readings/texts/ezra_pound_chinese.html

Topics for Discussion: world poetry, translation, orientalism

****TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAME DUE****

Session 7: Poetics of American Industry: Wen Yiduo in Chicago

Primary:

Wen Yiduo, *Red Candle: Selected Poems*, trans. Tao Tao Saunders (London: Cape, 1972) (selections)

Secondary:

Liansu Meng, "Wen Yiduo's Ecological Turn in Chicago." In *The Inferno Tango: Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917-1980*. Diss. (University of Michigan, 2010), 71-122

Topics for Discussion: the natural world, industrialization, pollution

Session 8: Chiang Yee's poetic travelogues: producing orientalism

Primary:

Chiang Yee, *The Silent Traveller in New York*. (London: Methuen, 1950)

Topics for Discussion: multilingualism, multimedia, visual art

Session 9: Conflicting Views of Wartime China: Mao Zedong and W.H. Auden

Primary:

Mao Zedong, *Poems of Mao Tse-tung*, trans. Nieh Hua-ling Engle and Paul Engle (New York: Dell Publishing, 1972) (selections)

***Sample syllabus, subject to revision

Mao Zedong, "Talks on the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," trans. Bonnie McDougall. In *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 459-484

W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (New York: Octagon Books, 1939) (selections)

Secondary:

Yi-hung Liu, "The World Comes to Iowa in the Cold War: International Writing Program and the Translation of Mao Zedong," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (September 2017): 611-631

Douglas Kerr, "Disorientations: Auden and Isherwood's China." *Literature and History* 5 no. 2 (1996): 53-67

Topics for Discussion: capitalism, propaganda, travel writing

Session 10: The Beats in China

Primary:

Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems, 1947-1985* (New York: Penguin, 1995) (selections)

Gary Snyder, *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions, 1971) (selections)

Secondary:

Yu Min, "Gary Snyder and China," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 6, no. 2 (Feb 2016): 417-422

Su Hui, "Allen Ginsberg's China," in *American Modernist Poetry and the Chinese Encounter*, ed. Z. Yuejun and S. Christie (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 123-132

Zhang Ziqing, "A Dialogue between Chinese and American Poets in the New Century: Their Poetry Reading, Translation, and Writing in Collaboration." *Comparative Literature: East & West* 15, no. 1 (2011): 65-81

Topics for Discussion: Buddhism, oral poetry, counterculture

Session 11: Bei Dao and the *Today* poets: Chinese Literature as World Literature

***Sample syllabus, subject to revision

Primary:

Bei Dao, *The Rose of Time: New and Selected Poems*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Yanbing Chen et al. (New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 2009) (selections)

Secondary:

Stephen Owen, "What is World Poetry?" *The New Republic*. (Nov. 19, 1990): 28-32

Liansu Meng, "The Birth of *Today!* Poets in 1978: Gender Politics and Underground Literature." In *The Inferno Tango: Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917-1980*. Diss. (University of Michigan, 2010), 165-224

Ronald R. Janssen, "What History Cannot Write: Bei Dao and Recent Chinese Poetry." *Critical Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (June 2002): 259-277 (optional)

Topics for Discussion: historical rupture, world literature vs. comparative literature

Session 12: Hsia Yu, Nieh Hualing, and cross-strait feminist poetics

Primary:

Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry, ed. Michelle Yeh and Nils Malmqvist (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) (selections)

Hsia Yü, *Fusion Kitsch: Poems from the Chinese of Hsia Yü*, trans. Steve Bradbury (Brookline, Mass.: Zephyr Press, 2001) (selections)

Nieh Hualing, *Mulberry and Peach* (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1988)

Topics for Discussion: Taiwan, immigration, gender

Session 13: Aku Wuwu's poetic sojourn in America

Primary:

Aku Wuwu, *Coyote Traces: Aku Wuwu's Poetic Sojourn in America*, trans. Wen Peihong and Mark Bender (Columbus: Foreign Language Publications, Ohio State University, 2006) (selections)

***Sample syllabus, subject to revision

Aku Wuwu, "Calling Back the Soul of Zhyge Alu"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXGHXZoZX_M

Secondary:

Wen Jin and Liu Daxian, "Double Writing: Aku Wuwu and the Epistemology of Chinese Writing in the Americas" *Amerasia Journal* 38, no. 2 (2012): 45-63

Topics for Discussion: mother tongues, indigeneity, multilingualism

Session 14: Xu Bing: poetry without borders

Primary:

Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, ca. 1987-1991

Xu Bing, *Book from the Ground: from Point to Point* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013)

Lewis Carroll, "Jabberwocky" from *Through the Looking Glass* (London: Macmillan, 1871)

Emojigeddon (2019) [film]

Secondary:

Lydia Liu, "The Non-Book, Or the Play of the Sign" in *Tianshu: Passages in the Making of a Book*, ed. Kathrine Spears (London: Quaritch, 2009), 65-79

Topics for Discussion: universalism, symbols, technology

****FINAL PAPER DUE****