



Still from the CCTV Television Series *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*, 1986)

While we celebrate all things “global,” our planet is actually entering into a new phase of deglobalisation. Global solutions are vital to reverse climate change and mass migrations, but anxieties about fuel self-sufficiency, migrancy, long economic supply chains and medical supplies are hardening territorial borders. In this course, then, we will consider how “national” cultures come into being. How do literary texts (and film adaptations) become “national epics,” thought to “represent” a nation? How and when might such imaginative texts emerge? When nations change, what happens to old, classic texts that no longer seem relevant, and what new art forms emerge to replace them? Can the *Song of Roland*, once compulsory study for all schoolchildren in France, and French colonies overseas, still be required reading today — especially if I am French Muslim? What about *El Cid* in Spain? How do some texts — such as the *Mahabharata* in India, or *Journey to the West* in China — seem more adaptable than others? Why is the national hero of Korea, Hong Gildong, a bandit, and Vietnam’s heroine, Kieu, a great poet and artist who becomes a prostitute and a nun? Our course begins out west, with Spain, France, Ireland, England, and Iceland, before

pivoting across Eurasian space to Iran, Russia and Mongolia, and then China, Korea, and Vietnam. The latter part of the course can consider nations as chosen by class members; past locales include the Philippines, Mexico, Guatemala, Scotland, Italy. Most all of us have complex family histories: Chinese-American, French Canadian, Latino/a/x, Jewish American, Pennsylvania Dutch, Lenni Lenape. Some students may choose to investigate, for their final project, family histories (and hence their own, personal connection to “national epics”).

**Texts Required:** in the early weeks these will be supplied by the instructor; you will need to order a couple of texts later in the semester, beginning with *Egil's Saga* for week 6 (Iceland): <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/353/35348/egil-s-saga/9780140447705.html>

Paperback, rather than Kindle versions, are preferred-- so that you will be able to annotate the work more freely. For list of books, see end of syllabus.

**Forms of Assessment:** Please submit assignments in the form YourName.doc. or docx. Each assignment will be assessed and commented upon by dw using Track Changes

**Assignment 1:** pass/ pass: a short meditation, of about 500 words or 2 pages, on the theme of personhood and nationhood. You may draw upon your own experiences here, or offer a response to texts and issues covered in class. This will serve a tune up writing exercise and will be especially useful if English is not your first language. Feedback will be provided. It will also help to provide a more detailed and nuanced account of your interests, of what you might hope for in this class.

**Assignment 2:** short essay, chosen from a list of topics to be provided (and covered in class): 5 pages.

**Assignment 3:** long essay brainstorm. Again, this need not be long: the chief point is to let me know how your thinking is developing, so that I can suggest further reading, focus on critical issues, etc. Some class discussion of topics and issues arising might prove useful.

**Assignment 4:** longer essay, 8-12 pages. Long, but not ridiculously long: compactness and concision are to be valued above catch-all bagginess.

**Workshopping:** each of you will have the opportunity to “workshop” your final essay with the class during the last weeks of the semester. This will offer you a chance to focus your plans for your essay, and also to receive feedback from prof and peers. A Powerpoint presentation generally works well for this; presentations generally run about 15 minutes total (presentation plus Q&A).

**Assessment:** assignment 1 p/f; ass. 2 30%; ass. 4 p/f; ass. 5 60%; class participation 10%