

Masaryk University – October 2015

Contemporary Chinese Literature: Negotiations of the Past

Instructor: Irmy Schweiger

Consultation hours: after class or by e-mail irmy.schweiger@orient.su.se

Classes: 12 sessions (intensive course)

Course description:

The PRC does not differ from other socialist countries where the state failed to convince society from its interpretations of the past. In contrast to history, which strives for a neutral and objective stance from which to narrate the past, literature can be thought of as multifunctional when it comes to traumatic history: as *healing* by restoring meaning where it has been destroyed, as *subversive* by telling counter-histories of the master-narrative, as *complementary* by integrating suppressed voices and painful experiences into the collective memory or as *disturbing* by narrating trauma as a persisting condition that continues into the present. During this course we will look into contesting narratives that are negotiating China's traumatic past. How is history dealt with in official Party history, in unofficial memoirs, in visual and literary texts that make use of different narrative modes to deal with collective trauma in 20th-century China and to reconstruct the past? In order to understand the relationship of historical trauma and collective memory and to show the way in which memory relates to the past and how far memory shapes collective identity of the present, among others the concepts of communicative and cultural memory by Jan and Aleida Assmann will be introduced.

Course activities/ requirements/ examination:

The course will consist of lectures, student presentations, discussions and group work. We will watch short film clips and documentaries, read, analyse and discuss theoretical and literary texts and you are very welcome to suggest literary texts or other material you would like to include.

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You are expected to attend class sessions regularly and well prepared. (ad 1). Seminar activities include students' presentations where you are welcome to work in small groups of two or three (ad 2), you will be asked to hand in your assignments before we meet in class (ad 3), and last but not least you will complete the course by writing a short term paper (ad 4). The term paper is not obligatory – see the final grading.

The final grading is:

EITHER exam (A-F), if the final essay is submitted (6 credits)
OR colloquium (P/N), without the final essay (4 credits)

1. active class attendance (30% of your final grade, 20% if the paper is submitted)
 - * read and prepare assigned texts as basis for class discussion
 - * share and discuss your thoughts in class
2. short presentation (40% each of your final grade, 20% if the paper is submitted) on a topic related to what is discussed in class
3. worksheets (30% of your final grade, 20% if the paper is submitted)
 - * worksheets are to be handed before our class session
4. term paper - only those, who passed the requirements above; exam (grading A-F) only; 40% of your final grade
 - * your final paper (4-6 pages) will be a discussion of a novel or short story that you will analyze on the basis of some to the concepts that we discussed in class

(Preliminary course plan)

<p>1. Introduction: State-Sponsored Amnesia vs. Memory Boom: How to Make Sense of a Paradox? <i>morning session (Mon) 9.10, M23</i></p>
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<p>2. Seminar: The Burden of Memory: A Comparative Approach <i>afternoon session (Mon) 12.30, M12</i></p>
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key words

comparative history, Holocaust and Cultural Revolution, Ba Jin, Jean Amery, Zheng Yi, Bei Dao

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set texts

Vera Schwarcz. "The Burden of Memory: The Cultural Revolution and the Holocaust" in *China Information*, vol. XI, no. 1 (summer 1996) pp. 1-13.

Liu Binyan. "An Unnatural Disaster" translated by Perry Link (review essay of Zheng Yi's *Red Memorial*) in Liu Binyan *Two Kinds of Truth. Stories and Reportage from China*, edited by Perry Link, 267-280. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.



Assignment 1

3. Lecture: A Tragedy of Good Intentions: The Master Narrative

morning session (Tue) 12.30, M11

4. Seminar: Scar Literature: Reflection of Collective Psychology

afternoon session (Tue) 15.50, M23

key words

scar literature, Lu Xinhua, Liu Binyan, "bright tail", catharsis

set texts

Lu Xinhua 路新华 "The Wounded" 伤痕 (1978)

Liu Binyan 刘宾雁 "The Class Counselor" 班主任 (1977)

Wang Meng



Assignment 2

Student Presentation (role and function of scar literature)

5. Lecture: Refusing to Forget: Unofficial Memoires

morning session (Wed) 9.10, M12

6. Seminar: Literary Testimonials

afternoon session (Wed) 12.30, M13

set texts:

Zhang Xianliang 我的菩提树 (My Bodhi Tree)

Feng Jicai 啊 (Ah!)



Assignment 3

Student Presentation (literature as testimony)

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7. Lecture: Concepts of Memory: Communicative and Cultural Memory

morning session (Thu) 10.50 M23

8. Seminar: Counter-narratives and subversive historiography I

afternoon session (Thu) 14.10 M11

CHOICE OF TERM PAPER TOPIC

set texts

Liu Heng

Mo Yan

Yu Hua

Su Tong



Student Presentation (root-searching, self-reflexive literature)

9. Seminar: Counter-Narratives & Subversive Historiography II

afternoon session (Mon)

1ST DRAFT OF TERM PAPER DUE!

set texts

Wang Shuo “动物凶猛” (Wild Beasts)

Ma Yuan “虚构” (Fabrication)

Yan Lianke



Student Presentation (meta-historical fiction, narration of the absurd)

10. Seminar: Social Media as Memory Spaces

morning session (Tue)

check out:

Hua Xia Zhi Qing: www.hxzq.net

Shanghai Zhiqing Net: <http://shzq.net>

Ultra-leftist Mao Zedong Study Group: www.maostudy.org

11. Seminar: Diaspora Interventions: Memoires of Exile

afternoon session (Tue)

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check out:

Chinese Holocaust Memorial (<http://www.chinese-memorial.org>)

Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution (<http://www.cnd.org/CR/english/>)

12. Wrap-up: Literature and History

morning session (Wed)

DEADLINE FOR TERM PAPER!