Teaching East Asian Literature in the High School workshop

July 12–18, 2009

Reading list

Please note: All literature readings are required.
RECOMMENDED HISTORY READINGS
(texts provided)

Chinese history:

- Schirokauer, Conrad, and Donald Clark. Chapters 1, 2, 6 (section 2), 9 (section 1), 10, 13, 14 (section 1), 15, and 16 in Modern East Asia: A Brief History. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

Japanese history:


Korean history:

- Schirokauer, Conrad, and Donald Clark. Chapters 3, 9 (section 2), 12 (section 2), 14 (section 3), and 18 (section 1) in Modern East Asia: A Brief History. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

OTHER RECOMMENDED HISTORY BOOKS OF INTEREST
(texts not provided)

Chinese history:


Japanese history:


Korean history:

TRADITIONAL CHINESE LITERATURE

Philosophy and Poetry

The first two selections for this session provide a window into the Confucian tradition (The Analects) and the early philosophical Daoist tradition (the Zhuangzi or Chuang Tzu). Confucianism and Daoism are the most important indigenous Chinese philosophies and set the groundwork for our investigations of traditional Chinese literature. When you read these excerpts, try to locate similarities and differences between the two traditions.

- What virtues are discussed? How are they to be cultivated?
- What is the relationship between individual and society? Individual and nature? Society and nature?
- What is the role of the literati or the intellectual?

Confucianism and Daoism can be related to two different literary theories: 1) writing serves society and 2) writing serves as self-expression. When reading our selections, try to identify which type of writing is taking place.

In the poetry, look for images of nature, love, and friendship and how they may reflect the author’s views about society. Think about Confucianism and Daoism and how these traditions may be reflected in the poetry. Think about connections between the poets; can we see evidence of earlier poetry influencing later poetry? Can we identify common symbols, allusions, or themes?


Prose Narrative

Chinese prose and fiction have their origin in dynastic histories, ghost stories, and oral storytelling. Authors hooked readers (or listeners) with compelling characters and exciting plots, while also conveying moral lessons. These hooks appear to have been highly successful; many of the stories on this list are more widely read today than ever. A casual jaunt through contemporary Chinese television at almost any time of day will bring remakes of Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Water Margin, or, most importantly, Journey to the West. Further considered in the context of the wide variety video-game reconfigurations, these texts have rather incredible influence and staying power. As you read, think about the following:

- In what ways do the characters represent Confucian values? Non-Confucian values?
- How are these values (and the decisions they lead to) rewarded and punished?


MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE

May Fourth Tradition and Alternative Visions

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals were active in discussions of how to save China from its semicolonial state. Chinese introspection engaged questions of balancing Chinese tradition and Westernization, defining Chinese “essence,” and creating a strong nation. The creation of new literary forms and styles was one aspect of this exploration. Lu Xun’s “Preface” to Call to Arms served literally as a call to arms for Chinese youth of the May Fourth Movement (1919). “A Madman’s Diary” was the first work of fiction to be published in vernacular language as opposed to classical Chinese. The strength of its message lies partly in the contrast between the stilted, classical language of the story’s introduction and the vivid, colloquial voice of the diary entries. Writings by Lu Xun, Ding Ling, and Shen Congwen fall within the May Fourth tradition, the
canonical fiction of this period. The stories by Zhang Ailing and Shi Zhicun fall outside of this
tradition—Zhang Ailing proudly labels herself a “petty urbanite” and is a popular writer, while Shi
Zhicun is a so-called New Percepcionist, often labeled “decadent” by its political critics. Note the
clear relationship between Dai Wangshu’s poem and Shi Zhicun’s story. The contrasts between May
Fourth and alternative visions highlight the debates between art for art’s sake and art for humanity’s
sake—a continuation of “writing serves as self-expression” vs. “writing serves society.” As you read,
think about the following:
• Do Lu Xun’s writings contain a sense of hope? Or a sense of futility?
• What are the links between Dai Wangshu’s poem and Shi Zhicun’s story?
• How are women (and gender roles) represented in these stories? What are similarities and
differences from pre-modern works?
• Are there consistent messages expressed in the stories by Lu Xun, Ding Ling, and Shen Congwen?
  If so, what? Are there differences, as well?
• In what ways are the stories of Zhang Ailing and Shi Zhicun different than works in the May
  Fourth tradition?
• Do we see evidence of Confucianism or Daoism in these stories? Do we see continuities between
  these stories and any of the pre-modern works?

• [1922] LU Xun, “Preface to A Call to Arms.” In The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese

• [1918] LU Xun, “A Madman’s Diary.” In The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature,
  1995. p. 7–15

• [1919] LU Xun, “Medicine.” In The Complete Stories of Lu Xun, translated by Yang Xianyi and

• [1929] SHEN Congwen, “Xiaoxiao.” In The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature,

• [1940] DING Ling [F], “When I was in Xia Village.” In The Columbia Anthology of Modern

• [1943] ZHANG Ailing [F], “Sealed Off.” In The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese

• [1928] DAI Wangshu, “Rainy Alley.” In The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature,

Post-Mao Literature

With the end of the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong’s death in 1976, there was an outpouring of new literature. “Wound” literature appeared first, detailing the abuses suffered at the hands of the Red Guards and the Gang of Four. Bei Dao rose to prominence during the 1976 Democracy Wall movement and now lives in exile. In the early eighties, “root-searching” literature emerged to reflect on Chinese culture and the problems of modern China. Avant-garde or Experimental authors also explored new writing techniques. They experimented with plot, time, and voice in often-shocking stories characterized by violence, death, and decay. During the post-Mao period, writers were once more able to address issues of sexuality and subjectivity. They were able to admit to contact with the West and influence by Western literature, thus promoting new genres, styles, and themes. As you read, think about the following:

- Do these stories express any ideologies? Are there any echoes of Confucianism? Daoism? Maoism? Others?
- Do you find any echoes of Lu Xun? Or is there a rejection of his tradition?
- In what ways do these stories explore subjectivity and individuality?
- Several of these stories (and poems) deal with “gaps”—in meanings, words, memories, reality vs. dreams. What do these gaps represent? How do they relate to the meaning of the works?

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE LITERATURE

The Conventions of Courtly Love

The excerpts in this first section all center on the tradition of courtly love as it developed in literature of the Nara (710–784) and Heian (794–1185) periods. Early poetry collections such as the Manyōshū and Kokinshū witnessed the appearance of conventional narrative/motifs for portraying a (typically doomed) love affair at the imperial court. These conventions were refined during the Heian period, most notably with Murasaki Shikibu’s endlessly inventive recasting of the tradition throughout her fifty-two-chapter The Tale of Genji. Finally, Sei Shōnagon’s Pillow Book satirizes the tradition of courtly love in passages that have not lost their freshness—or bite—in the thousand years since she recorded them. (Don’t miss the inept lover who stumbles about muttering the Heian equivalent of ‘Where are my socks?’)


Buddhist Themes in Medieval and Edo Literature

Our second lecture focuses on Buddhist themes as they appear in the medieval era (1185–1600) and the Edo period (1600–1868). We will look at four themes: 1) reincarnation; 2) karmic retribution; 3) the impermanence of all things; and 4) salvation through devotion to the Buddha/Buddhist doctrine. Be on the lookout for a sub-theme of #3—the uncertainty of the world—that led to the inclusion of startlingly secular passages in some of our texts.


**MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE**

*Psychological “Realism” in Modern Japanese Literature*

The first modern lecture deals with three stages of psychological “realism,” one of the prominent trends in literature from the Meiji period (1868–1912) to the present. In the texts of Meiji writer Higuchi Ichiyō, psychological “realism” appears as literary revision of the “idealized” mental struggles portrayed in traditional literature. Authors such as Shiga Naoya later reinvented psychological “realism” as a literary style with their creation of the stream-of-consciousness “I-novel.” Finally, literature after World War II initiated a new phase of psychological “realism” as social critique. Contemporary women authors, such as Takahashi Takako and Makino Eri, are notable for taking advantage of this latest incarnation of psychological “realism” to critically assess the institution of motherhood.


**Modern Japanese Fantasy**

Our final section on Japan ends with a discussion of Japanese fantasy literature. We begin with texts that adapt familiar conventions from Western science fiction, such as Rampo’s “Hell of Mirrors” and Tsutsui’s “Standing Woman.” We then continue with stories that derive their fantastic elements from early Japanese prototypes. For example, Akutagawa’s “The Spider’s Thread” references supernatural folklore, while Enchi’s “A Bond of Two Lifetimes—Gleanings” delivers an unexpectedly feminist message through its rewriting of a Buddhist miracle tale.
KOREAN LITERATURE

Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910): Korean Traditions, Confucian Values

The first set of readings presents a survey of vernacular poetry and prose during the Chosŏn dynasty. While the Koreans continued to write in classical Chinese, the creation of han’gŭl, the indigenous script, by King Sejong in the mid-fifteenth century laid the foundations for vernacular literature.

Sijo, a three-line verse form, was the most popular type of poetry during the Chosŏn. The subject matter ranged from politics and philosophy to romance and nature. The poets, likewise, came from a broad spectrum of backgrounds. The following selections, among the most well-known in the traditional corpus, were composed by Yi Pang-wôn and Chŏng Mong-ju, early Chosŏn political figures; Hwang Chin-i, a kisaeng (courtesan); and Yi Sun-sin, a military hero.

Vernacular prose also proliferated, especially in late Chosŏn. Princess Hyegyŏng’s “A Record of Sorrowful Days” is an autobiographical memoir of life at court and a rare example of writing by a Korean woman in pre-modern times. Hŏ Kyun’s “The Tale of Hong Kiltong,” often claimed as the first Korean novel, tells the adventures of a Robin Hood-like protagonist. “The Song of a Faithful Wife, Ch’unhyang” is Korea’s most famous romance.

A common thread that runs through both the poetry and prose is Confucianism. Established as official ideology by the dynastic founders, Confucianism profoundly influenced and shaped politics, society, and culture. The following selections provide examples that reflect the Confucian values, (e.g., loyalty and filial piety), as well as those that challenge them. In spite of Confucian hegemony during the Chosŏn, indigenous customs and ideas (e.g., hereditary aristocracy) persisted, and personal conflicts (e.g., romance) also led to confrontations with prevailing norms.


The annexation of Korea as a Japanese colony in 1910 brought an end to centuries of self-rule and ushered in a humiliating period of foreign subjugation. Korean writers grappled with the issue of colonialism and produced many works that promoted the spirit of national independence. The Japanese occupation period also witnessed another major transition—the birth of modern Korea. Whether it was industrial capitalism or Western-style education, old ways gave way to the new in the first half of the twentieth century. Literature was no exception, as new forms of poetry and prose made their appearance.

The poems of Kim Sowŏl, Han Yong’un, and Yi Sanghwa are anthologized in the Korean canon not only as pioneering works of modern verse but also as literary monuments to nationalism. In what ways do the following selections express the anti-colonial, national spirit of the Koreans under Japanese rule? In what ways are the poems open to other readings?

Nationalism during the Japanese occupation eventually developed into two opposing camps. The so-called “cultural nationalists” advocated a gradual approach toward independence that emphasized education and economic development. In contrast, the radical nationalists, inspired by Marxism, sought immediate liberation through armed struggle and social revolution. Yŏn Sang-sŏp’s “The Rotary Press” and Yi Ki-yŏng’s “A Tale of Rats” are literary representations, respectively, of these competing strains of Korean nationalism. Chu Yo-ŭp’s “Mama and the Boarder,” on the other hand, makes no reference to the political context and instead tells a love story that pits tradition against modernity.

Contemporary Korea (1945–present): National Division, Democracy, Globalization

The euphoria that followed Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonial rule at the end of World War II was short-lived as war and national division soon followed. In the north a totalitarian communist state was established and continues to this day. In the south a succession of dictators eventually gave way to democracy, and the country also emerged as a global economic powerhouse.

Sŏ Chŏng-ju and Ko Ŭn are two of Korea’s most prolific poets. Sŏ Chŏng-ju, whose life spanned almost the entire twentieth century, reflected in his vast oeuvre the shifting historical contexts while breaking new ground in imagery and language. Ko Ŭn is the most celebrated poet in Korea today. A former Buddhist monk and political activist, his poetry covers an extraordinary range of subjects and themes, from Zen philosophy to national reunification.

The prose selections below offer examples of literary engagement with various settings in contemporary Korea. Pak Wansŏ’s “Winter Outing” explores the tragedy of the Korean War and its personal legacies. Yi Mun-yŏl’s Our Twisted Hero can be seen as an allegory that probes the psychology underlying authoritarianism in South Korea. Finally, Kim Yŏng-ha’s “Whatever Happened to That Guy Stuck in the Elevator?” is a zany glimpse into the hectic urban life of post-modern Seoul.


Notes:
- Author’s surnames are in all capitals. Chinese and Korean surnames precede the given name. Japanese naming conventions in the traditional period are somewhat complex. Sometimes an author is referred to by his or her given name, formal title, or nickname. For example, in the case of Murasaki Shikibu, or “Lady Murasaki,” Murasaki is her given name and Shikibu is her title. In modern Japanese names, the surname precedes the given name.
- The date inside the bracket is the year the piece was first published. An asterisk (*) indicates the dates of the author.
- An [F] following the author’s name indicates the author is female.
- All names appear here in pinyin romanization.