

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 philosophical 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 our 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?

- Confucius. Excerpts from *The Analects*. In *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Vol. 1. Introductions to Asian Civilizations*, edited by William Theodore De Bary, Wing-Tsit Chan, and Burton Watson, p. 24–30. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.
- Zhuangzi. p. 40–47 in *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings*, translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.
- LI Bo. "Bring the Wine." In *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry: From Early Times to the Thirteenth Century*, translated and edited by Burton Watson, p. 207–208. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- TAO Qian (or TAO Yuanming). "The Peach Blossom Spring," translated by James Robert Hightower. In *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, edited by Victor Mair, p. 578–580. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- WANG Wei. "Autumn Dusk at a Mountain Lodge." In *Chinese Poetry: An Anthology of Major Modes and Genres*, edited and translated by Wai-lim Yip, p. 188. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.

- WANG Wei. "Deer Fence." In *Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, edited and translated by Stephen Owen, p. 393. New York: Norton, 1996.
- DU Fu. "The View in Spring." In *Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, edited and translated by Stephen Owen, p. 420. New York: Norton, 1996.
- (LIU Zongyuan. "River Snow." In *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry: From Early Times to the Thirteenth Century*, translated and edited by Burton Watson, p. 282. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- MA Zhiyuan. "To Heaven Pure Sand: Autumn Thoughts." In *Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, edited and translated by Stephen Owen, p. 740. New York: Norton, 1996.
- SU Dongpo. "To The Charms of Nian-nu: Meditation on the Past at Red Cliff." In *Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, edited and translated by Stephen Owen, p. 579–580. New York: Norton, 1996.

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, as many of the stories on this list are more widely read and viewed 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?

- *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Chapters 45 and 46, translated by Moss Roberts. In *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, edited by Victor Mair, p. 947–965. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Attributed to WU Chengen. *The Journey to the West*, Chapter 7, translated by Anthony C. Yu. In *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, edited by Victor Mair, p. 966–980. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

- Anonymous. "Wu Song Fights the Tiger" from *Water Margin*, translated by John Wang, commentary by CHIN Sheng-t'an. In *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, edited by Victor Mair, p. 997–1006. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994.

May Fourth Tradition and Alternative Visions

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinese intellectuals were active in discussions of how to save China from its semicolonial state. Chinese introspection engaged questions of balancing Chinese tradition vs. 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 in 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 in part 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, which is 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 Perceptionist, 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?

- LU Xun. “Preface to the First Collection of Short Stories, *Call to Arms*,” translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. In *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, p. 3–6. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

- LU Xun. “A Madman’s Diary,” translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. In *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, p. 7–15. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- LU Xun. “Medicine,” translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. p. 19–27 in *The Complete Stories of Lu Xun*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981.
- SHEN Congwen. “Xiaoxiao,” translated by Eugene Chen Eoyang. In *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, p. 97–110. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- DING Ling. “When I was in Xia Village,” translated Gary J. Bjorge. In *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, p. 143–158. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- ZHANG Ailing. “Sealed Off,” translated by Karen Kingsley. In *Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, p. 188–197. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- DAI Wangshu. “Rainy Alley,” translated by Gregory B. Lee. *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, p. 513–514. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- SHI Zhicun. “One Evening in the Rainy Season,” translated by Gregory B. Lee. *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, p. 126–135. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Post-Mao Literature

With the end of the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong’s death in 1976, there was an outpouring of new literature. “Literature of the Wounded” 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?

- LU Xinhua. “The Wounded.” In *The Chinese: Adapting the Past, Building the Future*, edited by Robert F. Dernberger, Kenneth J. DeWoskin, Steven M. Goldstein, Rhoads Murphy, and Martin K. Whyte, p. 591–604. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1986.
- BEI Dao. “Perfect,” “Untitled,” and “Landscape over Zero.” In *Landscape Over Zero*, translated by David Hinton and Yanbing Chen, p. 11, 69, 73. New York: New Directions, 1999.
- HAN Shaogong. “Homecoming?” In *A Place of One’s Own: Stories of Self in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore*, edited by Kwok-Kan Tam, Terry S. H. Yip, and Wimal Dissanayake, p. 126–142. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- ZHANG Jie. “Love Must Not Be Forgotten.” In *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, translated by Gladys Yang, p. 1–13. San Francisco: China Books and Periodicals, Inc., 1986.
- YAN Li. “Give it Back to Me.” In Yeh, Michelle, ed. *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. p. 195
- YANG Lian, “Dunhuang.” In *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, edited by Michelle Yeh, p. 218–219. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.