RECOMMENDED HISTORY READINGS
(texts not provided)


- 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.


TRADITIONAL CHINESE LITERATURE
(texts provided)

*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 books 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, Journey to the West (Also known as Monkey, which is the title of Arthur Waley’s abridged translation of the Chinese original), and scholar-and-beauty or court case short stories such as “The Rainbow Slippers.” 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?
- In what ways do these fictional narratives represent the everyday life of imperial China?


MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE

May Fourth Tradition and Alternative Visions

In the late 19th and early 20th 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 others fall outside of this tradition—Zhang Ailing proudly labels herself a “petty urbanite” and is a popular writer. 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?
- 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 different from 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?


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. 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, and they often wrote in highly satirical style, showing discontents over China’s recent political oppressions. 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?


Note:

- Author’s surnames are in all capitals. Chinese surnames precede the given name.
- The date inside the bracket is the year the piece was first published. An * 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. See the following chart for information about converting to Wade-Giles Romanization.