

**WRITING CHINA FROM AFAR:
Contemporary Literature of the Chinese Diaspora**

Belinda Kong
Asian 212 / English 273
Spring 2010
M 6:30-9:25
Mass Hall – Faculty Room

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& by appointment

Course Description

The telling of a nation's history is often the concern not only of historical writings but also literary ones. This course examines contemporary diaspora literature on three shaping moments of twentieth-century China: the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45), the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), and the 1989 Tiananmen protest movement and massacre. We will focus on authors born and raised in China but since dispersed into various Western locales, particularly the United States, England, and France. Critical issues include the role of the Chinese diaspora in the historiography of WWII, particularly the Nanjing Massacre; the functions and hazards of Chinese exilic literature, such as the genre of Cultural Revolution memoirs, in Western markets today; and more generally, the relationship between history, literature, and the cultural politics of diasporic representations of origin.

Primary Readings

- Shouhua Qi, *When the Purple Mountain Burns*
- * Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking*
- Shan Sa, *The Girl Who Played Go*
- Hong Ying, *Daughter of the River*
- * Zheng Yi, *Scarlet Memorial*
- Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*
- Ha Jin, *Under the Red Flag*
- * He Dong, *Ask the Sun*
- Yiyun Li, *The Vagrants*
- * Harry Wu, *Troublemaker*
- Gao Xingjian, *Escape*
- Annie Wang, *Lili*

Note: Starred titles are available as PDFs on Blackboard, under "Readings," as are several secondary articles (see Bibliography below, under Schedule). Please print these out ahead of time and bring hard copies to class on the scheduled dates.

Writing Assignments

There are three formal essay assignments in the course. Detailed instructions will be handed out at later points in the term. All three essays must be completed for a passing course grade. Late papers will be penalized one-third a letter grade per class day beyond the due date.

In addition, you will write a series of 2-page response papers. These shorter papers are intended to encourage initial exploration of the texts and will not be graded individually. Cumulatively, they constitute 20% of your overall grade. See handout for guidelines.

Oral Presentations

Each of you will be responsible for a 15-minute oral presentation on the literary work of your choice. Oral presentations are not graded individually but count as part of your overall participation grade. See handout for guidelines.

Class Participation

“Participation” means more than just attendance. You are expected to come to each class ready to discuss the assigned material. Contributions to class discussions in the form of thoughtful, productive comments or questions are an essential part of your participation grade. I favor quality over quantity: purely opinion-driven remarks such as “I love/hate this book” or “I agree/disagree with the author” may serve as catalysts for more substantive observations, but in themselves they neither advance our analysis of a work nor qualify as strong participation.

Grade Distribution

Essays	= 60% (20% each)
Response Papers	= 20%
Participation	= 20%

You are allowed two unexcused absences in the term. Each unexcused absence thereafter will result in the drop of one-third a letter grade from your participation grade.

In general, I adhere closely to this grade distribution. In exceptional cases, however, I reserve a margin of discretion for reward or penalty when calculating final course grades.

Grade Scale

An “A” paper is exceptional in every respect. The topic is complex and challenging; the thesis is original, persuasive, and well-supported; analysis of textual evidence is meticulous, precise, and thoughtful; the writing is crisp and vigorous. The writer goes considerably beyond a competent fulfillment of the assignment and addresses the text(s) perceptively, deeply, daringly. The paper contains minor to no mechanical errors and has no significant lapse in organization or logic.

A “B”-range paper fulfills the assignment with proficiency and care. It goes beyond a routine reading of the text(s) and shows clear signs of thought and planning, though it may lack the level of conceptual originality and/or analytic depth of the “A” paper. The topic is well-chosen, and the paper moves through a clear organizational structure. There may be moments of refreshing and powerful insight, but these may occasionally be offset by a lapse in logic, unsupported claims, and/or careless use of textual evidence. The overall writing is smooth, clean, free of jargon and clichés.

A “C” indicates a range of acceptable work. One type of the “C” paper competently carries out the assignment but in a perfunctory manner. The topic chosen may be appropriate but undemanding, and development of the topic may be predictable or shallow. Analysis of text(s) usually lacks depth of engagement, and conclusions often reveal little independence of thought. Another type of the “C” paper signals a general lack of care in composition or proofreading, leaving intact a moderate share of mechanical errors, awkward syntax, jargon and/or colloquialisms. A simple regurgitation of class notes also falls into this category.

A “D”-range paper indicates sub-standard work. The paper contains a variety of major issues: inappropriate topic that fails to address the assignment; no thesis, or else an underdeveloped or over-general thesis; utter lack of organization; poor or faulty handling of textual evidence; failure to engage with the text(s) altogether; etc. An abundance of mechanical and stylistic problems may obscure the writer’s meaning. Obviously sloppy and hasty work falls into this category.

An “F” is given to unsubmitted or plagiarized work (see below).

Academic Honesty

The word *plagiarism* derives from the Latin word for “kidnapping.” Intellectual kidnapping can take many forms. It can be as self-consciously deceitful an act as the calculated stealing of someone else’s words or ideas and passing them off as one’s own. More often, though, it is the result of inattention and carelessness, as when one forgets to provide proper documentation for external sources. Depending on the nature of the offense, penalty will range from failing the assignment to failing the course and, in the most serious cases, disciplinary action from the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs. Refer to the *Student Handbook* for a full statement of the Academic Honor Code.

As a rule of thumb, err on the side of safety and cite your sources. If you are ever unsure about how or when to do so, just ask.

Schedule

1. Jan 25 Overview

Unit I: The Sino-Japanese War (1937-45)

2. Feb 1 Shouhua Qi (i-134); Fujitani et al. (BB); Yang (BB); **RP #1 Due**
3. Feb 8 Shouhua Qi (135-273); Chang (BB); Fogel (BB); Hirsch (BB)
4. Feb 15 Shan Sa (1-143); **RP #2 Due**
5. Feb 22 Shan Sa (144-280)

Unit II: The Cultural Revolution (1966-76)

6. Mar 1 Hong Ying (1-131); Lu Xun (BB); Zheng Yi (BB); **RP #3 Due**
7. Mar 8 Hong Ying (132-278); Zhong et al. (BB); Grice (BB); **Essay 1 Due**
- Mar 15 * Spring Break
- Mar 22 * Spring Break
8. Mar 29 Dai Sijie; Chen (2 essays) (BB); **RP #4 Due**
9. Apr 5 Ha Jin; He Dong (BB); **RP #5 Due**
10. Apr 12 Yiyun Li (1-128); Harry Wu (BB); **RP #6 Due**
11. Apr 19 Yiyun Li (129-337)

Unit III: The Tiananmen Movement and Massacre (1989)

12. Apr 26 Gao Xingjian (vii-73); **Essay 2 Due**
13. May 3 Annie Wang (3-144); Munro (BB); Black & Munro (BB); **RP #7 Due**
14. May 10 Annie Wang (145-310)
- May 14 **Essay 3 Due** (by 4pm in my office)

Readings marked with (BB) are available on Blackboard.

Secondary Readings Bibliography

- Black, George, and Robin Munro. *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993.
- Chen, Lingchei Letty. "Translating Memory, Transforming Identity: Chinese Expatriates and Memoirs of the Cultural Revolution." *Tamkang Review* 38.2 (2008): 25-40.
- . *Writing Chinese: Reshaping Chinese Cultural Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Fogel, Joshua A. "Introduction: The Nanjing Massacre in History." *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*. Ed. Joshua A. Fogel. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000. 1-9.
- Fujitani, T., Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama. Introduction. *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*. Ed. T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama. Durham: Duke UP, 2001. 1-29.
- Grice, Helena. *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's Writing*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (2001): 5-37.
- Munro, Robin. "Who Died in Beijing, and Why." *The Nation* 11 June 1990: 811-22.
- Yang, Daqing. "The Malleable and the Contested: The Nanjing Massacre in Postwar China and Japan." Fujitani, White, and Yoneyama 50-86.
- Zhong, Xueping, Wang Zheng, and Bai Di. Introduction. *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*. Ed. Xueping Zhong, Wang Zheng, and Bai Di. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2001. xiii-xxxiii.

Authors' Names

Pen Name	Birth Name	Citation
Shouhua Qi	Qi Shouhua 祁壽華/祁寿华	Qi
Iris Chang	Iris Chun-ru Chang 張純如/张纯如	Chang
Shan Sa 山颯/山飒	Yan Ni 閻妮/阎妮	Shan Sa
Hong Ying 虹影	Chen Hongying 陳紅英/陈红英	Hong Ying
Zheng Yi	Zheng Yi 鄭義/郑义	Zheng
Dai Sijie	Dai Sijie 戴思傑/戴思杰	Dai
Ha Jin 哈金	Jin Xuefei 金雪飛/金雪飞	Jin
He Dong	He Dong 何東/何东	He
Yiyun Li	Li Yiyun 李翊雲/李翊云	Li
Harry Wu	Wu Hongda 吳弘達/吴弘达	Wu
Gao Xingjian	Gao Xingjian 高行健	Gao
Annie Wang	Wang Rui 王蕤	Wang

Response Paper Guidelines

As part of the writing requirement for this course, you will write a total of six two-page response papers.

What are response papers, and how do I write one?

Response papers are a genre unto themselves. They are short and focused, not as argumentatively full-fledged as formal essays but still analytical in nature. This means you can dispense with rehearsing basic elements of a work (plot summaries, character descriptions, etc.). Assume that your audience – myself, and sometimes your peers in the class – is generally familiar with the material and interested in reading a thoughtful exploration of some *smaller* aspect of the text. Instead of beginning big, narrow in on something that especially engages or intrigues you: a scene, an image, a concept, a word. Wallow in the complexity of this detail, and try to pursue a thread of thought as far as it will take you. Since you will have read only the first half of a work by this point, I am not expecting conclusive claims but initial ideas and honest reflections.

As its name implies, a response paper registers your response to a text. While I don't mind and sometimes even enjoy subjective remarks the likes of "I love/hate this book" or "this author is a genius/a boor," I don't consider such declarations of great analytical substance. You can certainly start with personal opinions or emotional reactions, but be sure to then consider how or why the text has achieved this effect on you. Always anchor your reactions in the text.

References to the secondary readings are welcome but not obligatory.

Logistics

Response papers are due the first class day for which a work is scheduled. For example, although Shouhua Qi's *When the Purple Mountain Burns* is scheduled for two class days, the response paper for it will be due on February 1. Since this assignment is intended to help you generate preliminary and original thoughts on a text, late response papers – i.e., those turned in after we initiate class discussions – will not be accepted.

There are seven due dates on the schedule, but you are allowed one pass in the term. There is no need to notify me in advance of a pass; you are responsible for keeping track of your own progress.

Although I will not be assigning grades to individual response papers, I will provide ample written feedback that should give you a sense of the quality of your work each time. Cumulatively, response papers constitute 20% of your final course grade.

Oral Presentation Guidelines

Each of you will be responsible for a 15-minute oral presentation on one major literary work of your choice. A sign-up sheet will be circulated next Monday. In preparation, please review the readings for this course and your schedules for this as well as your other courses. Come ready with a few preferences in case your first choice gets taken.

The oral presentation is an exercise in textual analysis. It is not a book report, so do not summarize the plot at length or expatiate on authorial biography or historical context. Instead, focus on two to three passages that strike you as particularly important, rich, suggestive, or challenging. For each passage, draw out some possible themes, ideas, and questions. Your main goal is to guide the class into a discussion of the text by probing complexities in plot, theme, language, etc. Attempts at making connections between literary works or to critical readings and the larger issues of the course are especially welcome.

On the evening prior to your presentation, post 2-3 discussion questions on the Blackboard Discussion Board by 10pm. Please email these questions to the class at the same time. This is the only written but a mandatory component of the assignment. The rest of the class will then use your questions to prepare for the next day's discussion.

Since this assignment is aimed to help you practice close reading – the skill of moving from small pieces of evidence to larger insights – avoid vague generalities. For example, while both novels in Unit I address the topic of war, a statement such as “the author discusses war” says nothing concrete about the passages you have isolated or the distinctive ways this text approaches the subject. To arrive at more nuanced thoughts, pay attention to tensions and contradictions within a text. A strong discussion question might take the following form: “While passage A illustrates *x* about the Sino-Japanese War, passage B suggests *y*. How do we reconcile the contrasting meanings posed by these two passages? Does the author provide support for one interpretation over the other elsewhere in the novel?” Alternatively, you can incorporate this unit's secondary articles about historiography into your discussion questions. However, instead of asking broad questions such as “How does this novel support or undercut the critic's argument?”, pinpoint exact passages that facilitate this line of inquiry: “Although passage A seems to support the critic's argument about the function of contemporary diasporic literature, in what ways can passage B be read as undercutting this argument?”

Keep in mind that you don't need to have all the answers. Often, an inquisitive and exploratory approach leads to the most fruitful conversations. Think of this assignment as an opportunity to generate and fine-tune your ideas for the formal essays.

The oral presentation will not be graded but will be tallied as part of your overall participation grade.