

CLTR 3010/5010: Survey of Traditional Chinese Literature
Professor Jack W. Chen (jwc8v@virginia.edu)
Spring 2017 / Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30–1:45 / New Cabell 058
Office Hours: Tues. and Thurs., 10–11 and by appointment

Overview

This is a broad introduction to traditional Chinese literature in English translation, covering major works and writings from the period between the sixth century BC and the end of the eighteenth century AD. We will read widely in the main classical genres, with selections to be drawn from lyric poetry (*shi*), rhapsody (*fu*), and historical prose. There will be some attention to historical, intellectual, and other cultural contexts, particularly as it helps us to understand the formation of the literary tradition.

As all readings are done in translation, no previous knowledge of Chinese culture or language is assumed. However, students will be expected to *become* familiar with *pinyin* romanization and to learn the names of the dynasties covered in the course.

Course Objectives

While a semester is hardly enough time to cover 2500 years of literature, it is the instructor's intention that the following objectives will be met:

- Students will attain a basic cultural literacy in the Chinese tradition and become conversant with the names of important writers and texts.
- Students will have a better understanding of how to think logically about textual analysis and how to write coherent, well-argued essays of textual explication.
- Students will gain a comparative perspective on how literary and rhetorical traditions differ throughout world cultures — as well as how examining a literary tradition *through* translation can create new insights into the understanding of a particular tradition.

Required textbook

Stephen Owen, ed. and trans., *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

Grading Policy

Ten 1 page short response	60% (lowest will be dropped, so 10 th paper is optional)
Final paper (10 pp.)	40%

A+ = 100–98 / A = 97–94 / A- = 93–90 / B+ = 89–87 / B = 86–83 / B- = 82–80

C+ = 79–77 / C = 76–73 / C- = 72–70 / D+ = 69–67 / D = 66–63 / D- = 62–60 / F= 59–0

I will expect that you attend each lecture. If you miss more than two lectures without giving prior notice, each subsequent missed lecture will count as -5% towards your final grade.

Extra credit: You will have the opportunity to increase your final grade by 5 points over the course of the semester by attending lectures sponsored by the East Asia Center. Each lecture that you attend will count as 1 point towards your final grade. You will be expected to attend the whole lecture and to send me a brief report on the main points of the lecture afterwards (or to show me your notes taken during the lecture).

Papers

The course is organized around 10 one-page short close reading response papers that will inform the longer 10 page paper due at the end of the semester. All writing assignments are close reading exercises, focusing on a small selection of texts and involving no secondary sources. The purpose of these assignments is to learn how to formulate and defend interpretative arguments using only primary literary evidence. As the disciplinary focus is a literary one, students will learn how to articulate plausible arguments based upon the interpretation of voice and persona, trope and figure, representation and allusion, and narrative form, among other aspects of literary study. Above all, students will gain experience in formal literary analysis.

It is highly recommended that students attend office hours on a regular basis and ask questions about writing and/or close reading before problems arise.

Schedule of Readings and Lectures

Thurs., Jan. 19. Introduction. *Classic of Poetry*: Hymns and Ritual.
Introduction of the course and discussion of the Chinese language(s), its script, and what reading in translation entails. Discussion of *The Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經) and the “Hymns” (*song* 頌) section, which represent liturgical texts of the Zhou people.
—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 10-11, 25–29.

Tues., Jan. 24. *Classic of Poetry*: Odes.
Continuation of *The Classic of Poetry*, with focus on the Zhou founding legends as represented in the “Odes” (*ya* 雅) section.
—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 11–25.

Thurs., Jan. 26. *Classic of Poetry*: Airs

Continuation of *The Classic of Poetry*, with focus on love songs in the “airs” section of the corpus. Discussion of how the seemingly simple language of these poems describes the complex relationships of society. Discussion of the basic rhetorical devices of this early anthology.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 34-57.

First 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues., Jan. 31. Early Historical Narrative.

Discussion of early historical narrative form (annals, biographies, parables) as well as the representation of character in early China. Close attention to the tale of Wu Zixu, one of the most famous revenge narratives in China.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 77-99.

Thurs. Feb. 2. Sima Qian, the first great historian of China

Reading selections of Sima Qian’s great work, the *Historical Records*, with attention to recurrent themes, rhetorical strategies, and narrative technique. Some attention also to his biography, as gleaned from his “Letter to Ren An,” which justifies his reason for accepting the punishment of castration instead of choosing the more honorable route of suicide.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 135-154.

Second 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues., Feb. 7. *The Lyrics of Chu*: “Nine Songs.”

An introduction to the other major early anthology, from Chu, the region of China south of the Zhou heartland, with particular attention to the difference in poetic language and imagery. Discussion of shamanism and religious ritual as reflected in the “Nine Songs.”

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 155-162.

Thurs., Feb. 9. *The Lyrics of Chu*: “Li sao.”

Introduction to “Li sao,” a long poetic narrative attributed to the loyal Chu minister Qu Yuan, and explanation of its use of flower imagery and cosmic journeys.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 162–75.

Third 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues., Feb. 14. *The Lyrics of Chu*: Journeys Heavenly and Earthly.

Continuation of discussion of *Lyrics of Chu*, with focus on the journey motif introduced in “Li sao” and developed in the poem “Far Roaming.” Attention also to poems inspired by “Li sao” and “Far Roaming.”

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 176–88.

Thurs., Feb. 16. *The Lyrics of Chu: The Encounter with the Goddess.*
Continuation of discussion of *Lyrics of Chu*, focusing on the goddess encounter motif as introduced by “Nine Songs” and “Li sao” and developed in later writings.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 189–203.

Fourth 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues. Feb. 21. *The Lyrics of Chu: Calling Back the Soul and “The Biography of Lady Li.”*

Conclusion to discussion of *Lyrics of Chu*, examining the soul-calling ritual and the

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 204–218.

Thurs., Feb. 23. *Yuefu* (Music Bureau) Poetry

Examination of the beginnings of the classical poetic tradition with attention to the development of poetic repertoires, conventional imagery, and commonplace themes in *yuefu* poetry.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 221–233.

Fifth 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues., Feb. 28. Anonymous Old Poems (*gushi*)

Continuation of discussion of the beginnings of the classical poetic tradition. Focus on “Nineteen Old Poems,” most famous of the anonymous poems circulating in the Eastern Han and early Wei periods.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 249–262.

Thurs., Mar. 2. Early Classical Poets and “Feast.”

Reading the first major historical poets of the early medieval period: Cao Cao and his sons, the Seven Masters of the Jian’an Era, Ruan Ji, and two poets of the Western Jin. Attention also to the banquet theme in classical verse.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 262–273; 274–284.

Sixth 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues. Mar. 7. SPRING BREAK

Thurs., Mar. 9. SPRING BREAK

Tues., Mar. 14. Tao Qian (Tao Yuan-ming).

Discussion of the most important pre-Tang poet, Tao Qian, who was famed for rejection of official life and return to farming, which was documented in his poetry. Discussion of how self is represented in poetry, particularly in relationship to scenery and space.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 309–319.

Thurs., Mar. 16. Class Canceled.

Tues., Mar. 21. Xie Lingyun, Bao Zhao, and the Southern Dynasties.

Discussion of Xie Lingyun, now thought of as first major landscape poet, with attention to Xie's usage of allusion and the poetic representation of landscape and place. Also, attention to Bao Zhao and his transformation of *yuefu* themes, and to poets of the Southern Dynasties.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 319–330.

Thurs., Mar. 23. Traditional Literary Theory.

Readings in major early comments and writings on literature, with an emphasis on the “Great Preface,” Lu Ji’s “Poetic Exposition on Literature,” and the opening section of the *Wenxin diaolong*.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 58, 63–67, 335–346.

Seventh 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues., Mar. 28. Introduction to Tang poetry.

An overview of poetic themes, subgenres, and styles common to Tang poetry, such as “parting poems.” Particular attention to the poems of Wang Wei, which often took conventional topics and transformed them through fine attention to issues of perception and perspective.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 365–384.

Thurs. Mar. 30. High Tang Poetry.

Readings in the most famous period of Tang poem, the so-called “High Tang.” Focus is here on Wang Wei, Pei Di, and Meng Haoran.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 385–397.

Eighth 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues., Apr. 4. Li Bo, Han-shan, and the quatrain form.

Continuation of discussion of Tang poetry, turning to one of the two most famous Tang poets, Li Bo, the “Banished Immortal.” Attention to Li Bo’s capacity for imaginative self-transformation. Also discussion of the Buddhist “poet” Han-shan and the quatrain form.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 397–412.

Thurs. Apr. 6. Du Fu.

Discussion of the greatest Chinese poet, Du Fu, “Sage of Poetry,” with attention to his long early poem “A Song of My Cares” and the poems written during the An Shi Rebellion (An Lushan Rebellion). Some attention to the role of the poet as historical and moral witness.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 413–425.

Ninth 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues., Apr. 11. Du Fu after the rebellion.

Focus on Du Fu after the An Shi Rebellion, with attention to how Du Fu constructs poetic scenes and represents the speaking subject. Discussion of the weight of the historical past and the self-imagination of the poet as witness to historical change.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 425–440.

Thurs., Apr. 13. Xuanzong and the Prized Consort.

Reading the image of Xuanzong and his beloved Yang *guifei* at the height (and fall) of the Tang dynasty. Continued discussion of the An Shi Rebellion (An Lushan Rebellion), which destabilized the Tang empire and led to its slow decline over the course of the next century.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 441–458.

OPTIONAL Tenth 1 page close reading response paper due in class.

Tues., Apr. 18. Tang literature of the frontier.

Examining the theme of the frontier in poetry over the course of the Tang dynasty. Particular focus on the creation of a literary space that exists both as historical reality and as imaginative topic.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 459–477.

Thurs., Apr. 20. Class canceled.

Tues., Apr. 25. Mid- and Late Tang poetry, Part 1.

Reading the poetry of Meng Jiao, Han Yu, and Li He. Consideration of poetry and literary writing after the An Shi Rebellion and the notion of literary belatedness.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 478–496.

Thurs., Apr. 27. Mid- and Late Tang poetry, Part 2.

Discussion of Bo Ju-yi, Du Mu, Yu Xuan-ji, and Li Shang-yin. The role of the poet as moral conscience, as well as the deflection of moral concerns. The idea of belatedness continued, with attention given to the imagination of feminine spaces.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 496–515.

Tues., May 2. Two Tang Tales (Ren's Story, Ying Ying's Story).

Reading Tang pseudo-historical narratives, often known as *chuanqi* ("transmitted marvels") or simply as *xiaoshuo* ("tales"). Consideration of the notion of fictionality (and historicity) and whether this is appropriate for reading medieval tales.

—Readings: Owen, *Anthology*, pp. 518–526, 540–549.

Final 10 Page Paper Due in Class.