Contemporary Chinese Literature and Culture: Negotiations of the Past

Intensive course, Zhejiang University

**General outline**

In contrast to history, which strives for a neutral and objective stance from which to narrate the past, literature can be thought of as multifunctional when it comes to traumatic history: as healing by restoring meaning where it has been destroyed, as subversive by telling counter-histories of the master-narrative, as complementary by integrating suppressed voices and painful experiences into the collective memory or as disturbing by narrating trauma as a
persisting condition that continues into the present. This course will look into contesting narratives in the broadest sense, which in one way or another are negotiating China’s traumatic past. In order to understand the relationship of historical trauma and collective memory and to show the way in which memory relates to the past and how far memory shapes collective identity of the present, the concepts of communicative and cultural memory by Jan and Aleida Assmann, among others, will be introduced.

Leading questions during the course are:

- How is individual/collective historical experience dealt with in national/official history? How is it dealt with in local/individual/unofficial narrative texts?
- What narrative modes are employed in visual and literary texts that deal with a disturbing past?
- What is meant by transcultural memory? Can we speak of an Asian memory scape? How does memory “travel”?
- How is memory institutionalised?

The course is planned as a one-week intensive course for Scandinavian MA students in China Studies, and counts as a total of 5 ECTS (135 hours). It will take place at a Chinese university campus and will be co-taught by one teacher from the Chinese university and one teacher from a Scandinavian university. The languages of instruction will be Chinese and English.

Prerequisites

It is assumed that students:

• Read and speak Modern Standard Chinese (Putonghua) at a level corresponding to the requirements for a BA degree in China Studies at a Scandinavian university
• Have comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture and society
• Have a basic interest and knowledge of cultural study research methods
Aims of the course

The main aims of the course are:

• That students become acquainted with theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches of cultural memory studies
• That students gain practical experience in these methods by analysing institutionalised memory sites and literary narratives
• That students broaden their perspective by looking at cultural memory as a site where, among other things, history and national identity are negotiated

Course outline

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<th>Theme/Title</th>
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<td><strong>Day One</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Morning session</td>
<td><strong>Welcome and Presentation</strong></td>
<td>Kirk A. Denton, 2014.</td>
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<td><strong>Introduction: Aims and structure of the course</strong></td>
<td>Jay Winter, 2008.</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion: Students’ earlier experiences with Cultural Studies, Memory Politics</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Lecture: State-Sponsored Amnesia vs. Memory Boom: How to Make Sense of a Paradox?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Seminar: Institutionalising Memory</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Assignment 1</strong></td>
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<td>Lunch break</td>
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<td>Afternoon session</td>
<td><strong>Lecture: Concepts of Memory: Communicative and Cultural Memory</strong></td>
<td>Assmann, 2008.</td>
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<td>Erl, 2011.</td>
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<td>Matten, 2012.</td>
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## Day Two

**Morning session**

**Excursion:** Visit to Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum
Check website before travelling:
http://www.nj1937.org/cn/index.htm

Read Ye Zhaoyan’s book and esp. the preface:
叶兆言：“一九三七年的爱情 正文写在前面”

## Day Three

**Morning session**

**Lecture:** Literary afterlives of the Cultural Revolution

**Workshop:** The Burden of Memory: A Comparative Approach

Assignment 2

Schwarz, 1996.

**Lunch break**

**Afternoon session**

**Workshop:** Tragedy of Good Intentions

Assignment 3

Weigelin-Schwiederzlik.
Zhang Yigong, 1986.

## Day Four

**Morning session**

**Lecture:** Literature as Testimony

**Workshop:** Autobiography and the Cultural Revolution

Zhang Xianliang,
*My Bodhi Tree.*

**Lunch break**

**Afternoon session**

**Workshop:** Witnessing the Cultural Revolution

**Film Screening:** Refusing to Forget – Unofficial Memoires
Wu Wenguang/ Hu Jie/ Xu Xing

冯骥才：”一百个人的十年”（节选）
### Learning activities

The course combines lectures, seminars and group discussions held in English and Chinese with a one-day fieldwork trip to Nanjing to visit the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum. Students will watch short film clips and documentaries, read, analyse and discuss theoretical and literary texts and are very welcome to suggest literary texts or other material for discussion. Seminar activities include students’ presentations where students are welcome to work in small groups of two or three. Students will be given assignments to prepare before each respective class session. Based on the course and the field trip, the students are required to present their individual projects in a poster session in order to complete the course. Attendance is compulsory according to the regulations of the Chinese university and students are expected to come to classes well prepared. Students will receive the list of readings about one month before the classes begin.

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<th>Morning session</th>
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<td><strong>Students’ poster presentations:</strong> Negotiations of the Past</td>
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<td>09.00 – 09.30 Nostalgia trips? Chinese tourists’ motivation to visit North Korea</td>
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<td>09.30 – 10.00 Mao Zedong’s Memorial Hall as Memory Site</td>
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<td>10.00 – 10.30 Chiang-kai Shek Memorial Hall and Memory Politics</td>
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<td>10.30 – 10.45 (break)</td>
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<td>10.45 – 11.15 Yuanmingyuan as Contested Site to Remember a Humiliating Past</td>
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<td>11.15 – 11.45 Role and Function of Cultural Revolution-Themed Restaurants</td>
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<td>Lunch break</td>
<td><strong>Students’ poster presentations:</strong> Negotiations of the Past</td>
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<td>Afternoon session</td>
<td>14.00 – 14.30 Family Memory of Sino-Vietnamese Boat Refugees</td>
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<td>14.30 – 15.00 The Trauma Process of a Perpetrator: The Case of Song Binbin</td>
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<td>15.00 – 15.30 Virtual Memory Spaces of the CR</td>
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<td>15.30 – 15.45 (break)</td>
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<td>15.45 – 16.15 Remembering the CR – Why has there been a Memory Boom?</td>
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<td>Wrap up and evaluation of the course.</td>
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before the course starts and are expected to have read at least the mandatory texts before the beginning of the course.

**Course requirements/ examination**

The students’ performance during the course, including active class attendance, written assignments, and a final poster presentation will count towards completion of the course. Seminar activities include students’ presentations where students will work in small groups of two or three, and will be asked to hand in assignments before class. Each student will give a poster presentation based on the topic students have signed up for in the last two sessions. The presentation is expected to provide contextual information, provoke critical thoughts, raise questions and trigger class discussion. The presentation should last for 10-15 minutes followed by comments and questions, altogether up to 20 minutes per student. The course will be graded according to the Chinese university’s point scale.

**Course Material**


Feng Jicai 冯骥才: “一百个人的十年”（节选）


Liu Binyan 刘宾雁 “The Class Counselor” 班主任 (1977)

Lu Xinhua 路新华 “The Wounded” 伤痕 (1978)


Mo Yan 莫言 “The Iron Child” 铁孩


Schweiger, Irmy. ”From Representing Trauma to Traumatized Representation: Experiential and Reflective Modes of Narrating the Past.” *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 2015, 9(3): 345-368, DOI: 10.3868/s010-004-015-0017-5

Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, Susanne. “Producing Cultural Memory in the PRC. On the Role of Historiography, Literature and Film in the Context of Writing China’s 20th Century History”


Yang Jiang 楊絳 “Six Chapters from My Life ‘Downunder’” 幹校六記


Ye Zhaoyan 叶兆言 *Nanjing 1937* (1937 年的爱情)

Ye Zhaoyan 叶兆言： “一九三七年的爱情 正文写在前面”

Yu Hua 余华 “1986” 一九八六


Zhang Xianliang 張賢亮 *My Bodhi Tree* 我的菩提树
Zheng Yi 郑义 “Maple” 枫 《文汇报》1979 年 2 月 11 日

Zheng Nian 郑念：Life and Death in Shanghai 生死上海（1987）（节选）