The Life of a Dead Language –
Classical Chinese in Modern Chinese Discourse

Intensive course, Zhejiang University

General outline

It is often assumed that Classical Chinese, also referred to as literary Chinese, is a “dead” language used only as the written medium of communication and discourse starting with early Chinese literary texts written from the 6th century BC and ending with the baihua movement in the early 20th century. Modern Standard Chinese did indeed replace Classical Chinese as the main means of written communication after the baihua movement. Features of Classical Chinese did not, however, disappear from the modern language when the classical language lost its status as the common form of written communication. Many semantic and structural forms and traces of the classical language can still be found within domains or genres of the modern Chinese language, such as in formal style, fixed phrases, proverbs,
compound words, slogans, quotations, ads, pop music lyrics etc. Features of the classical language are applied rhetorically and stylistically for specific discursive purposes in written texts. This course will combine theories of textual analysis taken from discourse analysis (Norman Fairclough) and apply them to the contemporary Chinese language in order to identify and grasp the rhetorical use of features of Classical Chinese in current discourse.

Topics that the course will cover are:

- Discourse analysis and language (Fairclough)
- Classical Chinese language as genre/style in discourse (analysis of e.g. Xi Jinping text)
- The history of the Classical Chinese language, Western and Japanese influences, and the *baihua* language reform (Ping Chen, Jerry Norman, Christoph Harbsmeier, Shen Guowei)
- The grammatical structure of Classical Chinese (Barnes et al. 2009)
- The forms of Classical Chinese in the modern language (Eifring et al. 2016)
- Readings in Classical Chinese texts (Barnes et al. 2009)

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
- Are able to handle both simplified (*jiāntìzì*) and traditional (*fǎntìzì*) forms of Chinese characters.
Aims of the course

The main aims of the course are to:

- Understand the main theoretical features of textual discourse analysis
- Develop familiarity with how discourse analysis can be used on Chinese text – in particular on the rhetorical functions of Classical Chinese in the modern written language
- Develop an understanding of the main classical features in the modern Chinese language
- Improve the students’ ability to read and understand classical elements in the modern language
- Help students become able to read simple texts written in Classical Chinese

Course outline

| Time          | Theme/Title                                                   | Material                                      |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|************************************************|
|               | **Day One**                                                 |                                               |
| Morning session| Welcome and Presentation                                    | Fairclough 2003 or later                     |
|               | Topic: Discourse analysis, genre and style                  | Barnes et al. 2009                           |
|               | This first session will introduce the theoretical framework to be applied in this course with a particular focus on how this can be applied to analyses of Classical Chinese in the modern Chinese language. In addition, this first session will give an overview of the main features of Classical Chinese and how these can be distinguished from standard modern usage. | Eifring et al. 2016                          |
|               | Note: Students are required to bring classical and modern Chinese dictionaries to all further classes. |                                               |
| Lunch break   |                                                              |                                               |
### Day Two

#### Morning session

**Topics:**
- *History of the Classical Chinese language*
- *Main classical forms of literature*
- *One example of a classical (rhetorical) text (e.g. 公孫龍子·白馬論)*

The history of the Chinese classical language and the main genres and types of classical literature in China will be introduced in the form of a lecture. This will be followed by the reading of a short and well-known Classical Chinese rhetorical text (e.g. 公孫龍子·白馬論).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Norman 1988, pp. 83-110</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handout of Classical Chinese text with commentaries.</td>
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</table>

#### Afternoon session

**Topics:**
- *Transmission from classical to modern language in China*
- *Reading of a few texts from the transition period analysed by use of discourse analysis*

The first part of this session will focus upon the transition from classical to modern language in China. The main historical features will be introduced through a lecture. Then, in the second part of this session students will work with a selection of texts from the transitional period to recognise and get familiar with the changes that took place during this transitional period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chen 1999, pp. 67-90</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harbsmeier 2001, pp. 373-410</td>
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<td>Shen 2012, pp. 265-281</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handout of excerpts from texts by e.g. Liang Qichao, Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi and others.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Day Three

#### Morning session

**Topics:**
- *Grammatical features of Classical Chinese 1*
- *Examples from modern usage*

In this session 5 students will work closely with a number of grammatical features in Classical Chinese and will identify rhetorical usage of these features in contemporary texts.

Students will identify their own selection of contemporary texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eifring et al. 2016</th>
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<td>Barnes et al. 2009</td>
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### Lunch break
### Learning activities

The course combines lectures, seminars and group discussions held in English and Chinese with a field trip. 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 ideas for a final poster presentation on the last day of 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 course starts.

#### Day Four

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morning session</th>
<th>Seminar Topic:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reading of 2-4 texts from classical literature</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Barnes et al. 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lunch break</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon session</td>
<td>Preparations for fieldwork and poster presentation.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Day Five

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morning session</th>
<th>Poster presentations.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lunch break</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon session</td>
<td>Poster presentations.</td>
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<td>Wrap up and evaluation of the course.</td>
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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. Students should collect their own empirical material and prepare main ideas and research questions analysed through the methods and theories described in discourse analysis. Each student will present the findings and analyses of their individual projects through a poster presentation in the last two sessions. The presentation should last for 10-15 minutes followed by comments and questions, altogether up to 30 minutes per student. The course will be graded passed/not passed.

Course Material


Eifring, Halvor, Ivo Spira and Rune Svarverud (2016). Handout developed for this course.


In addition, dictionaries of modern and Classical Chinese (digital or paper dictionary bought in a Chinese bookstore).