China in Translation: Theory, Art, and History
Chinese / Comp Lit 139

Phelps 2516
Tues/Thurs, 12:30–1:45pm

Syllabus version of April 28, 2018

Instructor
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HSSB 2223 *Office hours by appointment

Course Description
This course examines what happens to Chinese literature when it is translated into other languages and what happens to other languages when they are translated into Chinese literature. It uses the case study of China—long regarded as a unique civilization utterly distinct from the west—to explore recurring themes in the theory, art, and history of translation.

Our main source for texts will be poetry. There are two reasons for this. The first is that poetry is generally regarded as the most difficult kind of writing to translate, since every choice of words, rhythm, style, etc. has enormous consequences. The second is that poems tend to be shorter and therefore easier to explore in detail within the confines of a 75-minute class.

However, we will cover a wide range of other topics at the same time: the translation of Indian Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, modernist literature and ideogram theory, the digitization of the Chinese script, Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare, and Chinese-American graphic novels. The are an infinite number of ways one could approach this course, and an endless bounty of materials to cover. What I offer is a small selection to spark some thoughts.
The best way to learn about translation is to do it. Consequently, there is a large writing component to this course. Students will be asked to complete three, one-page writing assignments, most of which involve using a translation technique we have seen in the readings. Students will also develop a final project out of one of these writing assignments. This final project should put into practice some of the things we’ve learned in class about the different methods and ideas of translation.

This class is an experiment. We want to be light on our feet, willing to adapt to new circumstances and to try out different things. Have fun with it!

Objectives

• Learn how to do close readings of translations and other literary works
• Understand key issues in the field of translation studies
• Practice different approaches to translation through writing exercises

Requirements

No knowledge of Chinese is required for this course—all readings and assignments will be accessible in English. We will focus on primary texts, mainly translations of literary works into and out of some variety of Chinese. Some secondary scholarship will also be provided to put the primary readings in context.

In addition to the readings, we will share and discuss weekly writing exercises designed to put the various approaches we learn into practice. These will be due every Sunday night at 11:59pm. Please post these to the forum on Gauchospace. You must do three of the nine assignments.

You must also comment on one of your classmates’ writing exercises. The comment should be about a paragraph (3–5 sentences) in length. It should engage with your classmates’ work, relating it to the relevant readings. Do not simply say you liked or didn’t like something. Instead, tell us how it works. What is your classmate trying to achieve, and how do they achieve that? These comments should come in complete, well-formed, grammatical sentences that make a clear point. Also, we want to create an encouraging environment. Any comments that are mean, sarcastic, or otherwise denigrating will result in severe penalties. Comments are due every Monday at 11:59pm. You must comment on a classmate’s work for five out of the nine assignments.
For your final project, please translate a text from Chinese into English. The translation should be about 2–3 pages in length, and it should be accompanied by 3–4 pages of a translator’s introduction. This introduction should give some basic background information on the text and should outline your approach to translation. Drawing on what we have discussed in class, think about what you are including and what you are leaving out in your translation method. “Translation” can be understood loosely. You may expand one of your writing exercises for your final, or you can apply a new method to one of the texts we’ve covered, or you can apply one of the methods we used to a new text. Thinking outside the box is encouraged. If you want to do something very different from anything we’ve covered in class, please email me for approval by May 15.

All students get one absence, no questions asked. Any further unexcused absences will result in a reduced participation/attendance grade.

Grading

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation/Attendance</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Exercises</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>35%</td>
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Required Texts:

- Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*  
  (about $10; order from Amazon or Chaucer’s Books TODAY)

Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change based on the pace of the class and other circumstances. Any changes will be updated with a new version on Gauchospace, and students will be notified of changes via email.*

**Week 1: Introduction**

April 3: Introduction to the Course, Xu Bing, Du Fu

Writing: Translate pages 1–3 of Xu Bing, *Book from Earth*, into English. **Due Tuesday at 11:59pm. Comments due Wednesday at 11:59pm.**

April 5: *Daode jing* 道德經

*Readings: “175+ Translations of Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching, chapter 1”*  
  http://www.bopsecrets.org/gateway/passages/tao-te-ching.htm

**Week 2: Difference**

April 10: Chinese Differences

*Readings: Wolfgang Behr, “To Translate’ Is ‘To Exchange’”*  
Writing: Translate Li Bai’s “Song of the Roosting Crows” (see PDF) into a non-standard form of English, as Holton does with Scots. Non-standard forms of English include vernacular dialects, regional dialects, subcultural slang, internet speak, historical forms (Shakespearean English), and many more. Briefly explain introduce this non-standard form of English in your post. Due Tuesday at 11:59pm. Comments due Wednesday at 11:59pm.

April 12: English Differences
Readings: Brian Holton, Staunin Ma Lane: Chinese Verse in Scots and English (selections)

Week 3: Context
April 17: Footnotes
Readings: Chloe Garcia Roberts, Derangements of My Contemporaries
Martin Kern, “Thorny Caltrop,” pp. 79–91

Writing: Produce a version of Ode 6 (see PDF), imitating the styles of one of the translations we are reading for Thursday. Due Tuesday at 11:59pm. Comments due Wednesday at 11:59pm.

April 19: Understanding the Fountainhead
Readings: Book of Odes 詩經, #75–77, in multiple versions:
- James Legge, The Chinese Classics, Volume 4: The She King (1871)
- James Legge, The Book of Poetry (1876)
- Arthur Waley, The Book of Songs (1937)
- Bernhard Karlgren, The Book of Odes: Chinese Text, Transcription, and Translation (1950)

April 24: No class

Week 4: License
April 26: Changing the Words, part 1
Burton Watson, Chuang-tzu: Basic Writings, pp. 105–07, 109–110

Writing: Would it be possible to write something like a “split-merge poem” in English? If so, how? Give an example, either your own or one that already exists. Due Tuesday at 11:59pm. Comments due Wednesday at 11:59pm.

May 1: Changing the Words, part 2
Readings: Alan Levinovitz, “Slaying the Chinese Jabberwock,” The Believer (February 2011)
“Split-merge poetry” (PDF)
Week 5: Adaptation
May 3: Shakespeare in China
   Readings: Hsing-kuo Wu, Lear Is Here, video (120 minutes):
   ➔ Watch the clips “Wu Hsing-kuo as Lear questions his identity,” “The Fool explores his role,” and “Goneril’s declaration of love” from the sidebar on the right, but also click around on the full video to get a sense of the full production
   Alexa Huang, “Encountering Shakespeare’s Plays in the Sinophone World,” pp. 924–30
   Colin Mackerras, Peking Opera, chs. 1 and 3 (pp. 1–20, 38–56)

Writing: How would you adapt a story into a visual genre across cultures (such as an American story into landscape scroll painting, lianhuanhua, historical soap opera, Red propaganda, etc., or a Chinese story into a Hollywood film, superhero comic, Impressionist painting, ABC book, etc.)? Write a paragraph describing your plan, including information on the original story, the new genre, and how you would approach the project. Accompany this paragraph with at least two sample sketches in a medium of your choice (pencil, ink, vector graphics, etc.). Due Sunday at 11:59pm. Comments due Monday at 11:59pm.

May 8: Visual Translation and Self-Translation
   Readings: Gene Luen Yang, American Born Chinese
   Scott McCloud, Understanding Comics, pp. 24–93

Week 6: Musicality
May 10: Translating Sound
   http://www.asiancha.com/content/view/1621/273/

Writing: Translate one of the quatrains provided (see PDF) according to Stalling’s method. What kinds of decisions did it force you to make? What did you have to leave out? Due Sunday at 11:59pm. Comments due Monday at 11:59pm.

May 15: Back-translating Sound
   Readings: Jonathan Stalling, Yingelishi
   Yingelishi opera, https://vimeo.com/21183915

Week 7: Ideogram
May 17: Ideogram Theory
   Readings: Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry

Writing: Write a Cathay-style rendition of one of the poems provided (PDF).
Or
In one page, compare Pound’s version of “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter” with the more traditional translation provided. What are some differences between the two? What does Pound leave out or alter? Why might he have made those choices? Due Sunday at 11:59pm.

Comments due Monday at 11:59pm.

May 22: Imagist Poetry
Readings: Ezra Pound, Cathay

Week 8: Modernity
May 24: Modern Translation
Readings: “Responses to Yan Fu,” in Leo Chan, Twentieth-Century Chinese Translation Theory, pp. 67–90

Writing: Ted Chiang’s essay provoked a lot of controversy when it was first published, and one of his most vocal opponents was Thomas Mullaney. The two have very different opinions of the Chinese writing system and its relationship to innovation. What are these positions? How are they in conflict with each other? What are their reasons for holding these views? Write a one-page essay exploring these questions. Due Sunday at 11:59pm. Comments due Monday at 11:59pm.

May 29: Digital Translation
Readings: Ted Chiang, “Bad Character”

Week 9: Audience
May 31: Global Literature
Readings: Stephen Owen, “What is World Poetry?”
Rey Chow, Writing Diaspora, pp. 1–10
Yunte Huang, “Translation as Ethnography,” in Transpacific Displacement, pp. 164–82

Writing: Write a one-page response comparing Xu Yuanchong and David Hinton’s translation styles. How are they different? What are their different audiences, as implied by their translation styles? How might this shape the choices they make? Due Sunday at 11:59pm. Comments due Monday at 11:59pm.

June 5: Writing for Whom?
Readings: Xu Yuanchong, (selections)
David Hinton, trans., The Poetry of Tu Fu (selections)

Week 10: Conclusion
June 7: No class: work on final projects.

**Final Project due Monday, June 11, at 11:59pm by email**