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Curriculum Project
Notes for Mini-Lectures

I. Contemporary Literature in China

Earlier, most noted for poetry (Confucius calling attn. to *Book of Songs*; height Tang Dynasty)

Contact with West caused elevation of fiction to higher status

Modern Chinese literature usually dated from Lu Xun's short story, "Diary of a Madman" : "socially and culturally engaged literature" (Mostow 287).

Biddle: "Short story is most successful genre in modern and contemporary Chinese literature" (255).

Contemporary literature

First dating from Cultural Revolution 1966

- To create egalitarian, classless society in which all types of work regarded equally, people urged to put society first (children denouncing parents, educated sent to farms to learn from peasants, chosen for education not through exams, but votes of co-workers)
- Writers criticized for being bourgeois...sent to countryside for agricultural work or manual labor in cities. In 1976...looked back at "ten years of chaos" (257).
- Long history of censorship in China (burning of books in Qin), but at the height during Cultural Revolution.
- Zhou Enlai had protected some artists/writers during Cultural Revolution, so at his death in 76...some poetry mourning him was displayed. Though it was removed promptly, there was a gradual increase in publication of underground journals. Women writers also found success, as we will see in this unit.
- Scar literature (depicting wrongs perpetrated during Cultural Revolution (Biddle 257-258)

1985-1990

Gradual pull away from link between literature and political intentions

Economic changes increased draw of popular literature and led to the marginalization of serious literature. Results (greatly influenced by West):

- Root-seeking (Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum*)
- Modernist (Liu Suola's "You Have No Other Choice," Xu Xing's "A Variation Without a Theme," and Can Xue)
- Avant-garde (more experimentation in literary form, particularly narrative technique) Ma Yuan's "Goddess of Lhasa River" (influenced by Borges); Hong Feng, Ge Fei
- New realist: (reaction to accusation that avant-garde were ignoring the problems of the people) Chi Li, Fang Fang, Liu Heng, Liu Zhenyun (Hong 382-403)
- Upsurge in women writers (same as in May 4th movement). Wang Anyi is part of the group called "educated youth"...the ones who had lived through Cultural Revolution. She is known for "an exceptionally wide field of vision and the ability to harness many forms of life experience and literary subject matter" (Hong 410-411). She's prolific and has gone through many styles and topics in her career.

1990s

Popular fiction, television scripts...marketable writing (Wang Shuo) (Hong 438)

"Credited with establishing *pizi wenxue* or *liumang wenxue* (punk literature), fiction about hooligans, the laid-off, and the disenfranchised, Wang Shuo both made use of popular fiction forms and tapped into a

social discontent that made him extremely popular with young readers, as well as intellectuals” (Mostow 300-301).

Globalization

Early 1990s saw more political control of writers, but also beginning of consumer culture.

Cultural division: “‘mainstream culture’ (also called state ideological culture, official culture, and orthodox culture), intellectual culture (also known as refined culture), and mass culture (also referred to as fashionable or popular culture)” (Hong 440). Overlap...not clear division.

Avant-garde faded out...content more important. History still important, but seen from different perspective: looking at individuals or families, broader coverage...all of 20th c. Concern also with spiritual issues and critique of current issues. Also look at materialism and urban life. Ex. Wang Shuo. (Hong 440-449).

II. China: Ten Propositions

1. China is full of contradictions and complexities
 - a. Size, population
 - b. Land and people, rapid change
 - c. Diversity 56 ethnic groups, 93% Han, linguistic, cultural
 - d. Length of history, complexity of tradition, rapid change (less than 20 years ago, no sense of a private car; now..registering 1000 new vehicles a day); more internet users than u.s.; 350 cellphone users (more than our population)
2. China is more than China (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and diaspora)
3. China is less than China: most of the population is in the east
4. Centralized, authoritarian state. Hu Jintao is current president.
5. Viewing China is like looking through a kaleidoscope: point of view changes picture
6. Although undergoing transition at unprecedented scale and speed, certain cultural patterns remain: group over individual, age over youth (filial deference), male over female. Networking important.
7. Hong Kong and Taiwan exert great influence. One country two systems
8. Natural environment under great pressure and strain; China’s successes and failures in this area have global implications
9. Chinese socialism, Chinese Market Socialism...doing it their way
10. Beware of all propositions about China (Canning, “Ten Propositions”)

III. History of Modern China

China has long history.

Dynastic rule from X’ia, Shang, Zhou, Q’-in, Han, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Q’-ing...

First unified under Qin Shi Huang. Series of dynasties, alternating between short-lived ones (characterized by violence and discord) that eventually united the country, and then long lasting ones that enjoyed prosperity/advancement of civilization and eventual decline (usually due to natural disaster, seen as a mandate from heaven for a change in rule. Famous of long lasting ones: Han (205B.C.-220A.D.), Tang (618-906), Song (960-1279), Ming (1368-1644), Qing (Manchu) (1644-1911).

Middle Kingdom (center of cultural universe)

Three primary cultural influences:

I. Confucianism (from time of Confucius 551-479 B.C.)

Valued social harmony (in Warring States period) and looked to Zhou Dynasty as key
Personal integrity (education and self-cultivation), devotion to family, service to state (hierarchical, know place)

Confucianism part of state ideology from Han to 1905 (as part of civil service exam)

II. Daoism

Balance: stress on nature (This view of life is opposite of the Confucian view in many ways, but in the Chinese mindset, the philosophies balance one another and may be adhered to simultaneously.)

III. Buddhism...complemented the other two by addressing questions about suffering and death...gradually shaped...and fit in with local gods and ancestor worship (Yu).

Background of "Century of Humiliation"

1793: Emissary sent by King George, announcing British wanted warehouses, etc.... Q'ing emperor turned down proposition. "We possess all things"

1800s: British, to offset drain of silver, trade deficit, brought opium...found acceptance (boredom of upper class, escape for lower). The Chinese recognized problem, outlawed opium forced to open ports for opium trade and then for missionaries and entrepreneurs

1839: Opium War. 1842 Treaty of Nanjing (allowed foreign outposts)..beginning of Century of Humiliation. Unequal trade agreements: pay expenses of British, open up cities and ports, foreigners not subject to trials/law, surrender of land, foreigners decide tax...(rebellions 1850-64)

Sino-Japanese war 1894-5

Boxer Rebellion 1900 Empress Dowager

1912 Republic of China established, with Sun Yat-sen first President (end of dynastic rule)

- Get rid of foreigners; nationalism
- People's rights...recall incompetent officials, create laws, vote
- Livelihood...not taking property, but efforts to close gap between poor and rich

1915 Japan's 21 Demands intended to reduce China to protectorate

May 4, 1919. Student March on Tiananmen Square from Peking University. Chinese student protested against concessions to Japan and Versailles Treaty ending WWI (gave German territories in China to Japan) Japan "little brother" became wealthy and powerful (like Western imperialists in taking over)
The revolutionaries (influenced by Lenin): Sun Yat-sen saw he needed to cooperate with communists, including Mao Zedong

Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931. Rape of Nanjing 1937..part of WWII

Afterward, Taiwan (annexed by Japan in 1895), was returned to China)

Civil war between Nationalists and Communists (Nationalists withdrew to Taiwan 1949)

Mao Zedong (October 1, 1949) We will determine our own identity (even to today, resistant to others controlling internal affairs...need to redress grievances and regain whole; strong nationalist strain).

Mao's tomb still lines..picture everywhere.

Looked to Soviets, but determined to follow their own tradition..

1956 Hundred Flowers (wanted praise, but criticism emerged so he locked up those who criticized)

1958 Great Leap Forward (30-40 million died): back yard furnace to industrialize and create steel...catch up with Great Britain. Much of the steel created was not of use because of its poor quality: forests destroyed, land erosion, dying of starvation

Cultural Revolution 1966-76. Need to change values. Red Guards. Asked students how they should be graded: elite F, lower class A; smashing of artifacts, temples, things of the past

Deng Xiaoping 1976 (Doesn't matter if cat is black or white as long as it catches mice: reforms of 1979 (open diplomatic relations with US; Agriculture Responsibility System, township enterprises...getting out of state owned enterprises

- Modernization, stabilize population
- Crossing the river by feeling the stones

Impact: standard of living, emergence of middle class, travel, more freedom in media/lit

1989: Student protest against government corruption; wanting more democracy and more freedom of getting jobs...tied to earlier May 4...crack down

2001 World Trade Org.

2008 Olympics (Canning, "China"; Hsu; Gold)

IV. Marriage Customs in China

Matchmaker visits parents of girl. Gifts from man's family to girls. Lamb/goose/pheasant (goose eventually).; ask each other's names...to predict fortune; auspicious date; exchange of gifts..delivered to bride's family; invitations; receiving bride (sedan chair); Dowry: shoes, quilts with mandarin ducks; trousers for the elderly, showing respect to man's relatives; Chinese pronunciation of trouser=hardship (homonym, but different tones and different characters)...take this first, then good life.; mulberry trees and silkworms, celery, garlic onion, Chinese chives, with red string: meaning hardworking, clever and careful, and ever-lasting. Crying at wedding. Trace from kidnapping women, but more bitter cry, better the fortune: cry...sad to leave carefree girlhood and puzzled about future life; resentment at patriarchal society; gratitude to parents; regret over arrangement and inability to express individual will; sadness over parting old life

(Hu 152-198).

V. Hong Kong

At end of Opium war, 1842, Hong Kong given to the British in perpetuity. Other land leased, as result of concessions made at end of 1800s. (Britain received the New Territories in 1898 for a lease of 99 years, lasting until 1997). Negotiations started in 1982, concluded 84, took place 1997...turned back over to China (one country two systems): special administrative region.

As British colony...ruled by governor, executive council and legislative council. Not a democracy..

Objective: maximize environment for trade and commerce, maintain social stability, achieve and sustain positive ties to China.

Occupied by Japanese during WWII. Turned back to British '45..and when Mao and communists took power in 49, city of refugees: combination of poor and destitute and wealthy business elite.

50s-70s rise in international prominence...economic mecca:

Commercial port, light industry, efficient services, diligent work force, shrewd entrepreneurs, social and economic stability, uncorrupt British rule, monopoly as gateway to China's huge domestic market

80s and 90s changing relationship with mainland, from sales and manufacturing to banking and investment center...factories shifted to mainland (space and lower costs)

Their reaction to June 4, 1989. Candlelight vigils in Victoria Park.

Increasing growth...1941 1.6 million, 2000 6.8 million

Reputation as cosmopolitan hybrid of east and west; freedom of religion, media, rule of law, efficient relatively uncorrupt govt. outstanding business environment: low taxes, minimal govt regulation ambitious work force

Most globalized economy on earth (Canning, "Hong Kong")

VI. Notes on Selected Authors (may be used to introduce or inform discussion of individual stories)

Wang Anyi (1954-)

- Born in Nanjing. Raised in Shanghai. Winner of national literary prizes. Prominent and prolific.
- Attended writers' workshop in U.S.: difference in cultural values between the United States and China shocked her, and she decided to " 'write on China' when she returned" (qtd. in Mostow 593).
- *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (from which excerpt about *longtang* taken) "paints a portrait of the city through its historical and social changes of the past forty years. Different from her other Shanghai stories, which are set in post-1949 Communist China, this novel goes back to the early 1940s and thus connects itself with other fiction about Shanghai composed at that time by such writers as Eileen Chang" (Mostow 595). "Shanghai is the primary subject of this novel; Wang Anyi uses much textual space to depict the city, its alleys, the gossip (or street talk), the girl's inner chambers, the doves, the vicissitudes of the common city dwellers, of whom Wang Qiyao, the female protagonist, is but one. ...Born into a *shimin* [common] family in the alleys, Wang Qiyao grows up to become Miss Shanghai of 1946, after which she gets involved with different men at different stages of her life. She survives all the turmoil of modern and contemporary Chinese history only to be murdered in a fight with a thief over a box of gold bars in the 1980s. Despite her quite eventful life, Wang Qiyao is represented as the quintessence of the Shanghai *shimin* class; she embodies the down-to-earth, prudent, shrewd, pragmatic, and flexible lifestyle of the Shanghai people.." (Mostow 596).

Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) (1920-1995)

- Began writing in early 1940s in Shanghai (when it was occupied by Japanese)
- Popular during occupation, she was suspected of collaborating with Japanese, and career hurt once war ended. She moved to Hong Kong in 1952. Not mentioned for a while in PRC. "Only with the reexamination of literary history in the post-Mao era did a renewed Eileen Chang 'fever' sweep through cities on the mainland. Pirated editions of her early fiction and essays flooded street vendors' stalls, a phenomenon that went hand in hand with a collective effort to uncover a cultural history of Shanghai from the prerevolutionary era and to redefine the city as a major metropolis on a new global map" (Mostow 458).
- "Chang's most important literary legacy is the construction of an alternative wartime narrative, one that contradicted the grand narratives of national salvation and revolution that dominated the wartime literary scene. This narrative embraces a unique vision of modern history and depicts the shifting borders of a metropolis set against a backdrop of turmoil and ruins. In both her fiction and her essays, Chang often turns history into a stage production, with her characters dressed in 'costumes' embedded with symbolic meanings. Her impressionistic view of modern history highlights colors, lines, shapes, textures, and moods...In the midst of an orchestra of city sounds and myriad colors and shapes, the reader observes a social gallery of figures roaming

between the territory of historical reality (war, turbulence, blockade, hunger, death, and scarcity) and the domain of domesticity and private life (love, loss, fantasy, emotional yearning, and artistic creativity). Chang's choice of narrative style demonstrates her self-positioning—an entanglement between a personalized inward journey and a persistent, although not always explicit, attempt to come to terms with the immediate experience of the war" (Mostow 459-460).

Shen Congwen (1902-1988)

- Modern Chinese rural idealism
- To revisionist critics, he became "reminder of how much had been lost of China's earlier cultural modernity" (Mostow 425).
 - PRC: not Lu Xun, "neither socialist nor realist, treading his own anti-Confucian, pro-Western, yet nonurban and apolitical path" (Mostow 425).
- "From 1982 until his death, Shen Congwen was in the running for a Nobel Prize in literature, though he had abandoned creative writing after attempting suicide in 1949. Having studiously avoided political front groups for writers before the revolution, under Communism he found a new career in the less turbulent field of art history" (Mostow 425).
- "favored craft, experimentation, and Western modernism, but the public loved his reimagining of China as a preindustrial moral community offering not the modern solaces of nation, race, or strength in unity, but the familiar comforts of home and local diversity of custom. Calling himself a country boy and recorder of life, Shen developed a tradition of impressionistically documenting local places and their culture" (Mostow 425).

Wang Shuo (1958-)

- "Emerged as a literary force in the late 1980s, pioneering a movement labeled 'hooligan literature.' With his literary influence on pop culture, most critics single out 'the Wang Shuo phenomenon' as the most salient epochal marker of the shift from the 1980s to the 1990s. Unlike the high-minded cynicism of avant-garde writers or the dark, neorealistic portrayal of everyday urban life, Wang Shuo writes about disenfranchised youth 'playing' in the city to dispel their boredom, capitalizing on their ability to dupe members of the establishment" (Mostow 571).