

## Chinese Strange Writing: From Ghost Stories to Scientific Fantasies



A still from film "Painted Skin II" (2012), a loose adaptation of a *Liaozhai* story

### COURSE DESCRIPTION





Stories of ghosts, strange figures, and weird happenings have been universally enjoyed. Such stories have been produced in the Chinese languages for two thousand years, and they continue to adapt and flourish even to this day. This course is designed to acquaint students with some of the greatest and most intriguing examples of such writings from China's long literary history. As we move from the second-century brief notes, to medieval classical tales, to late imperial vernacular stories, all the way to modern and contemporary science fiction, we will familiarize ourselves with some of the most important literary styles and genres of Chinese literature. In this process, we will also explore the interaction between history and fiction, the interface between religion and literature, the malleable lines between the divine and the demonic, the questions of gendered monsters and deities, among other things.

### COURSE MATERIALS




*All readings will be available online. There are no required textbooks, but the following recommended books will be available on reserve in the library. All readings will be in English or English translation, although familiarity with Chinese will prove helpful.*

#### **Recommended Books:**

- 📖 Company, Robert Ford. *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*. Albany: State U of New York, 1996;
- 📖 Chan, Tak-hung Leo. *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-century Literati Storytelling*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998;
- 📖 Huntington, Rania. *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003.
- 📖 Owen, Stephen. *An Anthology of Chinese Literature, Beginnings to 1911*. W. W. Norton, 1996.

-  Santangelo, Paolo, and Yan Beiwen. *Zibuyu, "What the Master Would Not Discuss", according to Yuan Mei (1716-1798): A Collection of Supernatural Stories*. Brill, 2013.
-  Shahr, Meir and Robert P. Weller. *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996.
-  Wang, Dewei. *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
-  Zeitlin, Judith T. *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.

*Key to Symbols:*

-  Reading from books.
-  Electronic article available online.
-  In-class film screening.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **Class attendance and Participation (worth 10% of overall grade)**

Regular class attendance is an important part of the course. The class participation grade will be based on your preparation for and contribution to class discussions.

### **Online Response Posts (worth 15% of overall grade)**

Please complete the assigned readings before the scheduled sessions. You are required to write a minimum of five online postings (200-250 words) of your reflection on the course readings. Each post should be followed by 1-2 discussion questions you would like to raise to the class.

### **Individual Pre-class Research (worth 15% of overall grade)**

You are required to do some quick online/library-based researches on lecture-related topics. You will share in class your findings, such as images, stories, information about figures, places and periods, in class. Details are given in the schedules for Week 4, 6 and 7.

### **Two Short Writing Assignments (15% each, worth 30% of overall grade)**

Suggested topics and more detailed guidelines for each assignment will be handed out at least 2 weeks before the due date, and you are encouraged to discuss your topic with us before and during the writing process. For each of these assignments, you may choose one of the following two options:

- a) A short critical or interpretive essay (approx. 750 words or 3 double-spaced typed pages) based on a small number of class readings. The essay may also be a development of an idea explored in one of your online response posts.
- b) A creative writing assignment, i.e. writing your own short story in the style of a Chinese story of the strange, or in imitation of a certain author. Each of these assignments will be accompanied by a paragraph or two explaining your overall approach and final creative goal.

### **Final Project (proposal 5%, project 25%)**

For your final project, you may choose ONE of the following three options listed below. Please note that regardless of which option you choose, you must submit a proposal (approx. 250 words)

on the date indicated on the syllabus. You are also encouraged to meet at least once with your instructor to discuss your proposed project before you begin working on it. Plan ahead!

a) A critical interpretive essay (approximately 1500 words). You may choose to discuss a single literary work. You may also want to do a comparative or thematic study of more than one text. You should choose texts from the course readings, although they do not need to be ones that we have discussed in detail in class. You do not need to make use of secondary sources (this is not a research paper), but you may do so if you wish, as long as you use edited sources with named authors, rather than an online encyclopedia (Wikipedia, Baidu, etc). A list of suggested topics will be provided.

b) A performance piece. Together with no more than 3 other classmates, choose a story, and turn it into a short play. Your group may then either make a short video or prepare a live performance (10-15 minutes long) to be presented during the last week of class. Please note that each participant must also submit a writer's statement detailing their contribution to the project, and what they learned from it.

c) A translation project. This option is designed primarily for those with fairly advanced Chinese language skills. You may prepare an annotated translation of a short story you find interesting from the collections of the authors we talked about in class. Your translation must be accompanied by a translator's statement in which you describe the process of translation, including your translation goals, the difficulties you may have encountered along the way, the reasons you made the choices you did, etc. You should also talk about any outside sources you used, including dictionaries, other published translations, scholarly articles, etc.

## **COURSE POLICIES AND GRADING CRITERIA**

**Late Policy:** All assignments (including response posts) are due on the scheduled day and time. I will grant a single 2-day extension, no excuses necessary, which you can use for any written assignment. Outside of this extension, one full letter grade will be deducted for each day the assignment is submitted late.

**Academic Integrity:** In all of your assignments, including your response posts and papers, you must always make clear where you have borrowed from others by identifying the original source and extent of your use of another's work. This obligation holds whether the sources are published or unpublished and whether they are in print or on the internet. Plagiarism or other breaches of academic integrity will be reported and can result in a failing grade for the course.

**Academic Support Services and Disability Resources:** I will make every effort to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Please notify me as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester of any special accommodations needed.

**Religious observances:** Please notify me in advance if you need to miss class or reschedule assignments due to participation in religious holidays.

### **Grading criteria are as follows:**

1) An "A" paper is clearly written and well organized, and most importantly, contains a thoughtful, original and analytical central argument supported by illustrations and evidence drawn from course materials. It demonstrates that the student has grappled with the issues raised in the course,

synthesized the readings and discussions, and formulated a compelling, independent argument. An “A” paper is polished and grammatically fluid.

2) A typical “B” paper is a solid work that demonstrates that the student has a good grasp of the course materials. This type of paper provides a mastery of ideas and concepts covered in the readings and discussions, but with little evidence of independent thought or synthesis. Other “B” papers do give evidence of independent thought but do not present an argument clearly or convincingly.

3) A typical “C” paper provides a less thorough or accurate summary of course materials, or a less thorough defense of an argument. A paper that receives a grade less than “C” typically does not respond adequately to the assignment, is marred by frequent errors, unclear writing, poor organization, evidence of hasty composition, or some combinations of these problems.

The grading scale utilized in this class is as follows:

98+ = A+  
94+ = A  
90+ = A-  
87+ = B+  
84+ = B  
80+ = B-  
77+ = C+  
74+ = C  
70+ = C-  
67+ = D+  
64+ = D  
60+ = D-  
< 60 = F

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

### Week 1

#### Session 1: Introduction to the Course

#### Session 2: Chinese Cosmology and the Supernatural

Stephen F. Teiser, "Introduction: The Spirits of Chinese Religion," *Religions of China in Practice*, ed., Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 3-37.

Arthur Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," in *Studies in Chinese Society*, Arthur Wolf, ed., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978, pp. 131-182.

Cynthia Brokaw, "Supernatural Retribution and Human Destiny," in *Religions of China in Practice*, 423-436.

### Week 2

#### Session 3: *Zhiguai* 志怪, "Record of the Strange": Early Anomaly Accounts I

Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*. Albany: State University of New York, 1996, Ch 3 & 4, pp. 101-204.

#### Session 4: *Zhiguai* 志怪, "Record of the Strange": Early Anomaly Accounts II

Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*. Albany: State University of New York, 1996, Ch 6 & 8, pp. 237-272, 365-394.

### Week 3

#### Session 5: *Chuanqi* 傳奇, "Tales of the Marvelous": Tang Classical Tales I

Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature, Beginnings to 1911*, W. W. Norton, 1996, "Ren's Story," pp. 518-526; "Huo Xiao-yu's Story," pp. 531-539.

#### Session 6: *Chuanqi* 傳奇, "Tales of the Marvelous": Tang Classical Tales II

Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature, Beginnings to 1911*, W. W. Norton, 1996, "Ying-ying's Story," pp. 540-549.

\*First short writing assignment due.

### Week 4

#### Session 7: *Huaben* 話本, Ming Vernacular Stories

Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature, Beginnings to 1911*, W. W. Norton, 1996, "Du Tenth Sinks the Jewel Box in Anger" and "Censor Xue Finds Immortality in the Guise of a Fish," pp. 834-879.

Meir Shahrar, "Vernacular Fiction and the Transmission of Gods' Cults in Late Imperial China," in *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* eds., Meir Shahrar and Robert P. Weller, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996, pp. 184-211.

#### Session 8: *Shenmo xiaoshuo* 神魔小說, The Gods and Demons Novel I

Selected chapters from *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*).

Francisca Cho Bantly, "Buddhist Allegory in the Journey to the West," *the Journal of Asian Studies* 48, no. 3 (August 1989): 512-24.

📖 Meir Shahrar, “The Lingyin si Monkey Disciples and The Origins of Sun Wukong,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52.1 (June 1992): 193-224.

\* You are required to look online or from other sources for representations of the monkey king in any format or medium prior to class. Be prepared to share your findings in class.

## Week 5

### Session 9: *Shenmo xiaoshuo* 神魔小說, The Gods and Demons Novel II

📖 Selected chapters from *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*).

📖 Robert Campany, “Demons, Gods and Pilgrims: The Demonology of the Hsi-yu Chi,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews* 7 (1985):95-115.

📖 William J. Hynes, “Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide,” “Inconclusive Conclusions: Tricksters — Metaplayers and Revealers,” in William J. Hynes and William G. Doty, eds., *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993, pp. 33-45, 202-217.

### Session 10: *Shenmo xiaoshuo* 神魔小說, The Gods and Demons Novel III

📖 Robert Hymes, “Personal Relations and Bureaucratic Hierarchy in Chinese Religion: Evidence from the Song Dynasty,” in *Unruly Gods*, pp. 37-69.

📖 P. Steven Sangren, “Myths, Gods, and Family Relations,” in *Unruly Gods*, pp.150-183.

🎬 In-class screening of film “The Monkey King” (2014)

## Week 6

### Session 11: The Divine Feminine I

📖 “The Earliest Tales of the Bodhisattva Guanshiyin,” “A Sutra Promoting the White-robed Guanyin,” in *Religions of China in Practice*, pp. 82-105

📖 Robert F. Campany, “The Real Presence,” in *History of Religions*, pp. 234-272.

📖 Chün-fang Yü, “Images of Kuan-yin in Chinese Folk Literature.” *Chinese Studies*. 8.1:221-285.

### Session 12: The Divine Feminine II

📖 W. L. Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes*, selection.

📖 Brigitte Baptandier, “Introduction,” in *The Lady of Linsui: A Chinese Female Cult*, pp. 1-42.

\* You are required to look online or from other sources for representations of Chinese goddesses/supernatural women in any format or medium prior to class. Be prepared to share your findings in class.

## Week 7

### Session 13: The Fox I

📖 Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003, “Haunting and Residence”, pp. 87-126.

### Session 14: The Fox II

📖 Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003, “Foxes and Sex” and “The Fox Romance”, pp. 171-289.

\* You are required to look online or from other sources for Chinese representations of the fox in any format or medium prior to class. Be prepared to share your findings in class.

## Week 8

### Session 15: Pu Songling 蒲松齡: Historian of the Strange I

📖 Judith T Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993, Chapter 2, pp. 43-60.

📖 Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature, Beginnings to 1911*, W. W. Norton, 1996, "Lian-xiang," "Xiao-cui" and "Blue Maid," pp. 1103-1127.

### Session 16: Pu Songling 蒲松齡: Historian of the Strange II

📖 Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993, Ch 4, pp. 98-131.

## Week 9

### Session 17: Pu Songling 蒲松齡: Historian of the Strange III

🎬 In-class screening of film "A Chinese Ghost Story" (1987)

\*Second short writing assignment due.

### Session 18: Ji Yun 紀昀 and His *Cottage Notes* I

📖 Leo Tak-hung Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-century Literati Storytelling*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1998, Ch 1 & 2, pp. 1-76; Appendix 1, pp. 253-264.

## Week 10

### Session 19: Ji Yun 紀昀 and His *Cottage Notes* II

📖 Leo Tak-hung Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-century Literati Storytelling*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1998, Ch 6, pp. 187-244; Appendix 4, pp. 287-300.

### Session 20: Yuan Mei 袁枚 and *What the Master Would Not Discuss* I

📖 Paolo Santangelo, and Yan Beiwen, *Zibuyu*, "What the Master Would Not Discuss", according to *Yuan Mei (1716-1798): A Collection of Supernatural Stories*, pp. 1-57, 161-206.

## Week 11

### Session 21: Yuan Mei 袁枚 and *What the Master Would Not Discuss* II

📖 Paolo Santangelo, and Yan Beiwen, *Zibuyu*, "What the Master Would Not Discuss", according to *Yuan Mei (1716-1798): A Collection of Supernatural Stories*, pp. 108-160, 207-256.

### Session 22: "Recent Tales of Extraordinary Affairs": 19<sup>th</sup> Century Civil Wars

📖 Translation and introduction of a selection of late nineteenth century tales from my dissertation will be provided.


\*Final project proposal due.

## Week 12

### Session 23: "Recent Tales of Extraordinary Affairs": Encountering the Foreign and the Frontier


📖 Translation and introduction of a selection of late nineteenth century tales from my dissertation will be provided.


### Session 24: Translating the West and 20<sup>th</sup> century Scientific Fantasies I

 David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, Ch 5.


### **Week 13**

#### **Session 25: Contemporary Science Fiction: *The Three-body Problem* 三體**

 Cixin Liu, *The Three-body Problem*, trans. Ken Liu, New York: Macmillan, 2014, selection.

 Mingwei Song, “Variations on Utopia in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction”, *Science Fiction Studies*, 40.1: 86-102.

#### **Session 26: Contemporary Science Fiction: “Folding Beijing 北京折疊”**

 Jingfang Hao, “Folding Beijing”, trans. Ken Liu. *Uncanny Magazine*, Issue Two, online access.

 Han Song, “Chinese Science Fiction: A Response to Modernization”, *Science Fiction Studies*, 40.1: 15-21.

### **Week 14**

#### **Session 27: Wrap-up, Drafts Exchange, Discussion**

#### **Session 28: Performance Presentation, Final Project Due**