

HUMA5342
Spring 2026

Sentimental Republic: Emotion in Modern Chinese Literature

Shengqing Wu

Professor Division of Humanities; Office: Room 2380, Academic Bldg

Office phone: (852) 2358-8981; E-mail: hmswu@ust.hk

Office hours: 3:30 pm to 6 pm (Thursday), and by appointment

Time and Classroom

Wednesday: 3:00 pm to 5:50 pm

Room:

Course description

This course will employ an interdisciplinary approach to an examination of Chinese literature and culture from the late Qing to the Republican era, with a focus on the expression and representation of emotion and affect. Linking literature with other cultural and political discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we will examine the social and cultural significance of modern Chinese sentimentalism. This course will address broadly such topics as public/private sentiment, sympathy and empathy, translations of emotions, reformulations of the senses (sight, hearing, smell, tastes and touch), suffering and trauma, negative emotions (e.g. shame, anger, and grief), and gendering the public sphere. Critical questions include: How the senses, the expression of emotion, and sensibilities transform over time or are formulated differently in different locations; how emotions and sensibilities exert their important forces and instigate major societal changes; how cross-cultural exchanges in the modern era significantly reshaped the (re)presentation of emotions and sentiments; how the media (print, visual, audio, and digital) substantially rework the senses and sensibilities; what is the relationship between feeling or sentiment with the thoughts of a given time. The primary examples that we will examine include Lin Shu's translation and late Qing Theater; the Mandarin and Butterfly School and sentimentalism; Eileen Chang and other "sentimental" female writers; War and National sentiment, etc.

Intended Learning Outcomes

1. Enhancing students' critical thinking abilities and writing skills;
2. Gaining an overview of Chinese literature and cultures during the late Qing and Republican eras;
3. Mastering some fundamental concepts of sentiment, emotion and affect in literature, philosophy and visual studies;
4. Gaining firsthand experience in how to approach a text, an event, or a phenomenon through productive critical lenses.

Weekly Organization and Readings (Subject to Changes)

Required and suggested readings are accessible through the course web page (Canvas). Lectures, students' presentations, and discussions will alternate in class.

Assessment:

Attendance, Presentation, and Discussion: 20% +10% (10% for good in-class performance)

Short response papers and oral presentations: 20%

One group project: 10%

One final Paper: 40%

Assignments:

Course Requirements:

All students must attend classes regularly and finish readings before class.

1. Write a short response paper and post it online every OTHER week (1-2 pages), either in Chinese or English, five in total. **Due 5 pm, Tuesday (Canvas website)**

2. Students will be asked to give one or two oral presentations on the given topic. The oral presentation will not be graded.

3. Group research project on the literary/visual /cultural representation of one of the key issues relating to emotion.

4. Final paper. In English: 10-15 pages for MPhil and PhD Students, 8-12 pages for MA students; in Chinese: 10,000 Chinese characters.

Due @ 5pm on May 26, 2026.

Weekly Schedule (subject to change)

WEEK 1

2/4 Introduction

William James "What is an Emotion," *Mind* 34 (1884): 188-205.

Sara Ahmed, "Feel Your Way," in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Routledge, 2004), 1-19.

William Reddy: *The Navigation of Feeling* (Cambridge, 2001), part 1.

WEEK 2

2/11 Structure of Feelings and the issue of Qing

Raymond Williams on "Structure of Feelings"; William Reddy on "Emotional regime."

Haiyan Lee: *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*.

Stanford UP, 2006, Introduction.

《浮生六記》, 《恨海》 and other stories

WEEK 3 2/18 Spring Festival

WEEK 4

2/25 Sentimentalism, "public sphere," and Popular Literature

Habermas on "Public Sphere"

Lee, Haiyan: "All the Feelings That Are Fit to Print" *Modern China*, July 2001 vol. 27 no. 3, 291-327

周瘦鵑 and other stories

WEEK 5

3/4 Emotion and Gender I

Stephanie Shields: "Thinking about Gender, thinking about theory: Gender and Emotional experience," in *Gender and Emotion*, ed. Agneta H. Fischer

Yang Lianfen: *Langman de Zhongguo* 浪漫的中國 (part1)

Rey Chow: *Women and Chinese Modernity* (selections)

凌淑華、馮沅君 and other stories

WEEK 6

3/11 Emotion and Gender II

The Making of Modern Romance: Eileen Chang

WEEK 7

3/18 Form and Empathy

Raymond Williams, from "Industrial Novels," in *Culture and Society*, 2nd (Columbia Univ. Press, 1983), 87-91.

Frederick Jamison, from *The Antinomies of Realism* (Verso, 2013), ch. 1-

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 1-25.

Suzanne Keen: *Empathy and Novel*, Chap 1 "Contemporary perspectives on empathy."

WEEK 8

3/25 Modern Media and Affect

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (part 1)

Bao Weihong: *Fiery Cinema*, Introduction

周瘦鵑小說《留聲機片》；小城之春（1948, dir. Fei Mu 費穆）

WEEK 9

4/1 Sensory experience and affect

Teresa Brennan, "Introduction," in *The Transmission of Affect* (Cornell Univ. Press, 2004), 1-23.

Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995), 83-109.

Patricia Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theory, Culture & Society* 25.1 (2008): 1-22.

Selected articles from *Empire of the Senses* edited by David Howe.

陳子善編，《脂粉的城市——婦人畫報之風景》（浙江文藝，2004年）。

WEEK 10 spring break 4/8

WEEK 11

4/15 History of Emotions: Trauma and Melancholia

Freud: *Mourning and Melancholia*

Cathy Caruth: *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Introduction only)

Yu Dafu: "Sinking" and others

WEEK 12

4/22 History of Emotions: Ugly Feelings

Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Promise of Happiness* (Duke Univ. Press, 2010).
Ann Cvetkovich, "Introduction," in *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Duke Univ. Press, 2012).

Philip Fisher: *The Vehement Passions*, Princeton UP, 2002. (Intro, Chap. one and two)

Peter Stearns, *Shame: A Short History* (Chap 1-3)

《野草》等

WEEK 13

4/29 Remaking the Discourse of Qing

王德威、陳國球《抒情之現代性》(selection)

梁啟超、潘光旦、朱謙之等

WEEK 14

5/6 Students' presentations of group projects