
WOC 207 / CHINESE 408

Translation Workshop: The Reflection of Meaning

Chinese-English / English-Chinese



Spring 2023, Session 4

Course meeting time: TuTh 8:10pm-9:10pm (China Standard Time)

Academic credit: 2

Course format: Seminar

Instructor's Information

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Austin Woerner received his B.A. in East Asian Studies from Yale University and his M.F.A. in creative writing from the New School. A Chinese-English literary translator, he served as English editor for the Chinese literary journal *Chutzpah! (Tian Nan)*, and his work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *The New York Times Magazine*, the *Kenyon Review*, and other literary publications. He has published two volumes of poetry in translation (*Doubled Shadows: Selected Poetry of Ouyang Jianghe* and Ouyang Jianghe's book-length poem *Phoenix*) and a novel by Su Wei, *The Invisible Valley*.

What is this course about?

This class is a practical introduction to the art of written translation for students with advanced proficiency in both Chinese and English. Its goal is to give students hands-on experience translating a variety of interesting and challenging texts between Chinese and English, thereby honing their skills as readers and writers of both languages while also probing deeper philosophical questions about how translation works. The emphasis of this class is on the subtleties of how meaning is conveyed on the sentence- and paragraph-level, hence its subtitle, "The Reflection of Meaning." (A complementary course, "Translation Workshop: Adaptation and Transformation," focuses on creative translation and localization, and may be taken either before or after WOC207 / CHINESE 408.)

Though this class focuses on the nitty-gritty details of words and sentences, students will find that the work we do is far from a rote, mechanical exercise. Most people tend to think of translation as a simple conversion process where a word or phrase in one language equals a word or phrase in the other, the goal being to produce a text whose meaning is "faithful to the original." However, the readings and exercises we do will challenge us to look beyond these common assumptions toward deeper truths about how meaning is reflected across languages, in the process forcing us to grapple with some fundamental questions about reading and writing: What are the different ways a text can "mean" something? How does a text interact

with the mind of a reader? How does culture affect this interaction? Through exploring these questions, students will hopefully become both defter translators and more discerning readers of translated texts, able to speak with precision about what makes a translation successful or not.

WOC207 / CHINESE 408 is a **bilingual course**. Class sessions will alternate between being taught in English and Chinese. In this way students will have the chance to practice discussing core course concepts in both languages. For EAP-track students (Chinese native speakers) the course will serve as an upper-level writing elective that will further build their reading and writing skills in English, while at the same time heightening their awareness of the nuances of written Chinese. For CSL-track students (international students with advanced proficiency in Chinese) the course will serve these purposes as well, but it will also act as an upper-level Chinese language elective where they can practice speaking, reading, and writing in an authentic language environment with Chinese classmates. Guest appearances by native Chinese-speaking faculty will reinforce this language environment. In the event that no international students enroll, native English-speaking guests will be enlisted to aid in class activities as necessary.

Special emphasis will be given to literary texts since they are the instructor's specialty. However, we may also consider also other genres including film subtitles, journalism, marketing language, political discourse, and theater. In addition to translation games and exercises and bilingual reading assignments, students will work in mixed groups of EAP- and CSL-track students to undertake a series of "translation challenges" in which they must come up with creative solutions to particularly difficult, context-specific translation problems, and share their solutions with the class. At the end of session, each student will write a brief essay reflecting on the problems they encountered and analyzing the choices they made in their challenges.

What background knowledge do I need before taking this course?

- ❖ EAP-track students must have completed EAP101 and EAP102, or have permission from the instructor.
- ❖ CSL-track students must have completed or placed out of CHINESE401-402.

What will I learn in this course?

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- ❖ Articulate clearly, using English and Chinese, the subjective effect a written text may have on a reader, based on objective observations of the text
- ❖ Write in English and Chinese with a greater awareness of how common sentence patterns differ between the two languages
- ❖ Translate texts into your native language (or primary writing language) with a greater awareness of how context, genre, metaphor, and cultural associations affect your choices in terms of style, diction, word choice, etc. – and be able to use this kind of literary terminology precisely to justify your own choices.
- ❖ Anticipate what aspects of a foreign-language text you might *not* fully understand, and ask smarter questions of a native speaker to elucidate those aspects.
- ❖ Assist someone translating out of your native language by answering the kind of questions that would be helpful to a translator reading your language as a second language
- ❖ Read translated texts with greater awareness of what might have gone into producing them and why they affect their readers in the way they do

How will I know if I have met the objectives of this course?

- ❖ Reading and translation exercises: You will have close-read a series of interesting challenging texts in Chinese and English in a variety of genres, and attempted to render them effectively into the other language, working together with classmates who are experts in your second language

- ❖ **Discussion:** You will have discussed these texts, and your and your classmates' translations, in both English and Chinese, and developed lists of key terminology in both languages that will allow you to have these conversations more precisely in both English and Chinese
- ❖ **Reflection:** You will have written a final essay (of about 1000 words, in your second language) reflecting on your experiences in the class and analyzing the translation problems you and your classmates have encountered.

How can I prepare for the class sessions to be successful?

To be successful in this course, you should:

- ❖ Complete assigned readings before class and make sure you understand and remember the main points of the readings so that you are ready to talk about them in class.
- ❖ Complete assigned writing tasks before the class period in which they are due.
- ❖ Manage your time effectively and budget ample time for your final project.

What required texts, materials, and equipment will I need?

No textbook required. All course texts will be distributed as handouts. These may include:

- Excerpts from Lu Min, "Paradise Temple" (tr. Brendan O'Kane) 鲁敏, 《西天寺》
- Essays from Han Han (韩寒), *The Problem With Me* (tr. Alice Xin Liu and Joel Martinsen)
- Excerpts from Liu Cixin, *The Three-Body Problem* (tr. Ken Liu / Joel Martinsen)
- Excerpts from Lu Xun short stories (tr. Julia Lovell)
- Excerpts from Lu Xun, *Wild Grass / Weeds* 《野草》 (tr. Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi, tr. Matt Turner)
- William Blake, "The Proverbs of Hell"
- Essays from Wang Xiulu, *The Mirror of Translation* (Chinese) 王岫庐, 《翻译之镜: 文字的辨认与寻绎》
- Essays from Susan Bernofsky and Esther Allen, eds., *In Translation: Translators on Their Work and What It Means* (English)
- Selections from David Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?: Translation and the Meaning of Everything* (English with Chinese translation)

What optional texts or resources might be helpful?

Many useful handouts are found on Duke's Writing Studio web site: <http://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio>.

What are the course policies?

Course Policies: Instructors' expectations for all assignments and activities will be made as explicitly as possible, given the likelihood of a wide range of background conventions and habits among the students. The Duke Kunshan University Community Standard will be discussed and adhered to.

Academic Integrity: Each student is bound by the academic honesty standard of Duke Kunshan University. Its Community Standard states: "Duke Kunshan University is a community composed of individuals of diverse cultures and backgrounds. We are dedicated to scholarship, leadership, and service and to the principles of honesty, fairness, respect, and accountability. Members of this community commit to reflect

upon and uphold these principles in all academic and non-academic endeavors, and to protect and promote a culture of integrity.” Violations of the DKU academic honesty standard will not be tolerated. Cheating, lying, falsification, or plagiarism in any practice will be considered as an inexcusable behavior and will result in zero points for the activity.

Attendance: Students are responsible for all the information presented in class. As indicated above, class attendance and participation are important components of the grade. All students are expected to participate during class time.

Absences and Tardies: If you are unable to attend a class session, tell the instructor. Repeated absences or tardiness may negatively impact your final grade.

Guidelines on getting help from other students and WLS coaches

- ❖ It is appropriate – even recommended - to:
 - Show your papers to other students (classmates, roommates, friends) and ask for general feedback.
 - Ask other students questions about specific language points, in other words, whether _____ is right or wrong, how _____ is used, etc.
 - Practice speaking a language you are trying to learn with other students.
 - Rehearse presentations and oral exams in front of other students and ask for general feedback.
 - Get help from coaches in the Writing and Language Studio with papers, specific language points, speaking practice, rehearsing presentations, and preparing for examinations.
 - Check with your professors about specific assignments to see how much help you can get and how much you are allowed to work with others.
- ❖ It is not appropriate to:
 - Ask other students to read your papers and correct all the language mistakes for you.
 - Ask other students to write papers or design presentations for you.
 - Ask other students to correct homework assignments for you.
 - Expect other students – especially roommates - to spend a lot of time helping you.
 - Ask coaches in the Writing and Language Studio to edit/proofread a paper for you.
- ❖ Basic rules-of-thumb:
 - It is appropriate to ask for help learning and improving your language skills.
 - It is not appropriate to ask someone to do your work for you.
 - Of course, it is also not appropriate to copy phrases and sentences from other sources and then put them in your own papers without quoting and citing the source.

What campus resources can help me during this course?

Writing and Language Studio: For additional help with academic writing – and more generally with language learning – you are welcome to go to the Language Learning Studio (LLS), located in the Conference Center. You can find more information on the LLS website.

Academic Advising and Student Support: For general assistance with academic coursework, staff in the Academic Resource Center can provide recommendations on academic success strategies (e.g., tutoring, coaching, student learning preferences). Please visit the Office of Undergraduate Advising website for additional information related to academic advising and student support services.