WS 200-3  Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Chinese and American Autobiographies

Ningping Yu
Wednesday, 9:30-12:30
Office hours: Wed., 1:00-2:30

In this course we will examine autobiographical texts by women from Canada, China and the United States. Our goal is to study the lives of women in different cultures, societies and historical periods to build a sense of connection and to explore women's diverse experiences. We will be looking for connections and contradictions, raising questions and sharing responses to issues women face. We will pay special attention to ways in which historical circumstances, cultural assumptions, religion, political and economic conditions intertwine to shape women's lives in different social and cultural contexts. By examining these lives, we will gain insights into universal as well as culture-specific issues faced by women. This will help us understand the development of international feminisms and comprehend the differences and similarities in women's movement across the world.

Required readings:
A Woman Soldier’s Own Story: The Autobiography of Xie Bingying (2001)
Nisei Daughter by Sone Monica (1953)
Obasan by Joy Kogawa (1981)
The Small Details of Life: 20 Diaries by Women in Canada, 1830-1996 by Kathryn Carter (Editor) 2002
Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China by Jung Chang (1993)
The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston (1976)

Course requirements and Grading Structure:
25% - Attendance, Participation and weekly response paper
25% - Group Project and Presentation
50% - Term Paper

Description of assignments:
- Attendance: your attendance record.
- Participation: your involvement in and contribution to the discussions.
- Weekly Response Paper: Each student is required to write a one-page response on the reading of the week. This is your preparation for class discussion. These pages will be collected at the end of the semester and graded as part of the participation grade.
- Group Project: Students will form groups of 4-5 and share their stories of a particular stage, e.g. childhood, adolescence, university years, middle age, old age, or of a particular subject, e.g. family responsibilities, parental expectations, career, etc. The stories may be collected by interviewing family members or from one’s remembered past. The group is to identify some shared as well as differentiated characteristics or themes from these stories and present a report with specific examples in class about their findings.
- Term Paper: Each student will write a 10 page paper (typed and double-spaced) research paper discussing an issue in women’s life and experience, using at least one source (oral or written) that has not been discussed in class.

Prerequisites: WS 101 or WS 102 – may be taken concurrently

The Department of Women’s Studies encourages clarity of thought and expression and good writing. Students will be evaluated on these skills in all courses given by the Department.