
Self-Debasement and Westernization: Yu Dafu and the Development of China's National Identity

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2023 Hesburgh Library Research Award Essay

14 May 2023

Research Award Application: Modern Chinese Literature Assignment

In the spring semester of 2023, I extensively used library resources as part of my assignment to write a 10 page research paper on a topic of my choice relating to Modern Chinese Literature. The topic I focused on was the development of the national Chinese identity during the New Culture Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, using the short story *Sinking* by Yu Dafu to critically examine the nuanced effects of China's attempt to modernize by abandoning tradition for Western ideals but also building up a Chinese identity that is superior to the West. The Library's resources were critical to the development of my research paper as I found vitally important sources for my research by using research tools from the library as well as access to databases. Library resources helped me understand the scope of my project, narrow down what I was looking for, and find the right resources to build my argument.

First, the library gave my class a workshop on how to conduct research using library resources and how to use those resources to write a quality research paper. East Asian Studies Librarian Hye-jin Juhn put together a presentation of the many resources available to us relating to Modern Chinese Literature. Juhn expertly explained how to use catalog and OneSearch search functions, which databases were available for us to search, how to find texts of the sources we wanted, and how to request them if they were not immediately available. Additionally, She compiled all of this information in a resource guide specifically for our class which I used extensively to start my research progress. Specifically, I found the JSTOR database link and link to the *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* journal most helpful, and most of the secondary

sources that I found used JSTOR searching functionality that I would not have had access to without the library's support and Juhn's resource guide. Consequently, I used these resources to ensure that the sources I used were credible since they were coming from reputable, peer-reviewed journals or edited books.

Additionally, Juhn also helped me focus on my research. She showed us that research is not necessarily finding facts to cite, but rather gathering information and data to compare different views on the topic. Because of this, I focused on using library resources to try to find sources that provided different perspectives on the short story *Sinking* as well as researchers who offered new perspectives on the topic than the commonly accepted ones. This mindset helped me find important information to use in my paper. On JSTOR, I found two sources from *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, "From the De-Based Literati to the Debased Intellectual: A Chinese Hypochondriac in Japan" by Feng Lan, and "The Meaning of Foreign Text in Yu Dafu's 'Sinking' Collection" by Valerie Levan, that each analyzed a unique part of *Sinking* that provided me with ways of looking at the text that I would not have considered. Primarily, Lan argued that Dafu was portraying the plight of the Chinese study abroad student and actually argued against modernization, which is a perspective that contradicts what many critics say about the story. While my paper ultimately did not agree, Lan made many important points that I used in my writing and Juhn's explanation of research helped me realize that a source that may not completely align with my argument is still useful to include in my writing. As for the other source, Levan noted the significance of the extensive use of foreign language in Dafu's writings which were situated during a time of language transformation in China and related to modernization. I never would have considered this part of the text because I read an English

translation rather than the original text, and it enhanced my argument about how China's modernization affected the language and the writers who tried to write with it.

Not only was JSTOR irreplaceably beneficial to my project, but I also used EBSCO to search multiple different Chinese Literature journals at one time. Using both databases, I was able to find two sources providing data on the historical context of the New Culture Movement and the difficult position that Chinese writers found themselves in when trying to write using a changing language to represent their experiences. The background that these sources provided allowed me to dive deep into the development of the Chinese national identity and show how the effects of those developments were shown in Yu Dafu's "Sinking". Furthermore, these two databases were also convenient for my note-taking workflow because they were compatible with my Zotero app which allowed me to easily save the source texts and all of the information needed to cite them with a single click. I was able to use them to work more efficiently to compile and compare my sources due to the ease of access and compatibility of these databases provided by the library.

Overall, I used the library's resources for research paper writing to find reputable sources that greatly enhanced my ability to write a nuanced argument about the historical, social, and political development of China and Chinese literature during the New Culture Movement. I utilized the databases provided by the library as well as links provided by the librarian in charge of East Asian Studies to find information on the nuanced perspectives of the development of the Chinese national identity and the unique relationship that "Sinking" has with that development. Without library resources, my research would have been more shallow and broad and my argument would have been less compelling.

Word Count: