

Berkeley takes novel approach to card game

By CHEN JIA in San Francisco
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A popular card game from China is in this fall's course catalog at the University of California, Berkeley.

Sanguosha is a role-playing card game with Chinese elements. *Sanguo* means Three Kingdoms, and *Sha* means killers. The game is based on *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a classic Chinese novel from the Ming Dynasty (AD 1368-1644) that draws from events of the Three Kingdoms period (AD 220-280).

"I knew UC Berkeley had some pretty awesome courses, but this tops it all," said Andrew Tam, a 24-year-old graduate student, referring to the state university's main campus.

Each player takes a role card based on characters from the novel, equipped with distinct skills and weapons. War in the game is waged channeling the fury, intelligence and cunning of the novel's characters.

"*Sanguosha* is very popular in China because it's related to its cultural heritage," UC Berkeley law professor Robert Berring, the faculty sponsor of the course, said.

Berring believes it's important that students understand the

novel, so he tries to get undergraduates acquainted with essential philosophy dating back to China's ancient dynasties.

"China has such a rich and special history. If you don't understand that, you cannot possibly understand China," he said.

Understanding the age-old system of rules exemplified in *Sanguosha* would help any student grasp the constant changes taking place in modern Chinese society, said Berring, who has taught Berkeley undergrads a course titled Chinese Law and Society for about 30 years.

Sanguosha is an elective offered through a university program that lets students, under the supervision of a faculty member, design and implement a course. Trevor Chou, Darian Ng and Katherine Pan, all senior undergrads, are the course facilitators.

Chou, 21, a Chinese-American, said the idea for the course sprang from his interest in the Three Kingdoms era, enhanced by playing the computer game *Dynasty Warriors* in middle school.

"The game introduced me to a lot of the names of famous historical figures in the Three Kingdoms period and I learned the fascinating stories of their exploits," he said.



Young people play *Sanguosha*, a role-playing card game from China based on *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, in Beijing in April.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chou started searching for an English-language edition of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* but couldn't find one. He first saw *Sanguosha* — which is similar to the modern game *Bang!* — being played by Chinese students on campus but didn't join them because he couldn't read Chinese characters well.

In China, the game is typically played in large groups of teenagers and young adults who huddle around tables in cafes and college bars.

Yoka Games, a Beijing-based developer, reported that sales of its popular version of *Sanguosha* totaled 20 million yuan (\$3 mil-

lion) in 2009. The figure rose to 100 million yuan in 2010.

Chou spent part of last summer in a study program at Peking University, where he met Ng, a fellow Chinese-American.

"He revealed to me his interest in *Sanguosha*," Chou said of Ng. "He also mentioned that, like me, he lacked the necessary skills in written Chinese to play *Sanguosha*."

But Ng told his new friend that he planned to buy a deck of *Sanguosha* cards and figure out a way to translate the game into English.

Back at Berkeley, Ng bought the cards and found a website

that translated the game rules and role descriptions. The two young men were soon inviting American friends to learn the game.

As Chou played, familiar names would pop up again and again, rekindling his interest in the Three Kingdoms era. But he also noticed that Ng's friends, who had no prior knowledge of the era, were soon remembering the names of the characters and learning about them.

"My *Sanguosha* sessions made me see the game as a fun and engaging way to introduce people to the Three Kingdoms period," Chou said.

He brought up the idea for the course with Katherine Pan, a friend from high school, who suggested Berring as their faculty sponsor.

Sanguosha, the course, will be able to accommodate only 30 students once it begins on Aug 30. As of Wednesday, the university's online description of the course had been viewed more than 11,500 times.

Hu Guang, a teaching consultant with Tiandao Education, a Chinese company that advises on implementing Chinese study programs abroad, said the creative approach of the course design could inspire

students.

Some native Chinese students at Berkeley, however, see the course as designed for non-heritage learners, those who didn't grow up exposed to the Chinese language at home or in their communities.

"Chinese students don't take it too seriously," a Berkeley sophomore from China surnamed Lei said. "It isn't a required course, just an easy option for Chinese students who want to kill time and get the two units."

"It's pure entertainment, so I didn't see any need to take the course," said Allison Huo, a Chinese undergraduate.

Literary lion remembered for biting wit and wisdom

By HILLEL ITALIE
in Los Angeles
The Associated Press

In a world more to his liking, Gore Vidal might have been president, or even king. He had an aristocrat's bearing — tall, handsome and composed — and an authoritative baritone ideal for summoning an aide or courtier.

But Vidal made his living — a very good living — from challenging power, not holding it. He was wealthy and famous, and committed to exposing a system often led by men he knew firsthand. During the days of president Franklin Roosevelt, one of the few leaders whom Vidal admired, he might have been called a "traitor to his class." The real traitors, Vidal would respond, were the upholders of his class.

The author, playwright, politician and commentator whose vast and sharpened range of published works and public remarks were stamped by his immodest wit and unconventional wisdom, died on Tuesday at age 86 in Los Angeles.

Vidal died at his home of complications from pneumonia, his nephew Burr Steers said. Vidal had been living alone and had been sick for "quite a while", Steers said.

Vidal "meant everything to me when I was learning how to write and learning how to read," Dave Eggers said at the 2009 National Book Awards ceremony, where he and Vidal received honorary citations. "His words, his intellect, his activism, his ability and willingness to always speak up and hold his government accountable, especially, has been so inspiring to me I can't articulate it."

Along with such contemporaries as Norman Mailer and Truman Capote, he was among the last generation of literary writers who were also genuine celebrities — regulars on talk shows and in gossip columns, personalities of such size and appeal that even those who hadn't read their books knew their names.

His works included hundreds of essays, the best-selling novels *Lincoln* and *Myra Breckinridge* and the Tony-nominated play



ROBYN BECK / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

The man who would be king: US author Gore Vidal pictured in his Los Angeles home.

The Best Man, a melodrama about a presidential convention revived on Broadway in 2012.

Vidal appeared cold and cynical, dispassionately predicting the fall of democracy, the American empire's decline or the destruction of the environment. But he bore a melancholy regard for lost worlds, for reason and the primacy of the written word, for "the ancient Ameri-

can sense that whatever is wrong with human society can be put right by human action."

Vidal was uncomfortable with the literary and political establishment, and the feeling was mutual. Beyond his honorary National Book Award, he won few major writing prizes, lost both times he ran for office and initially declined membership of the American Academy

of Arts and Letters, joking that he already belonged to the Diners Club. (He was eventually admitted, in 1999).

But he was widely admired as an independent thinker — in the tradition of Mark Twain and H.L. Mencken — about literature, culture, politics and, as he liked to call it, "the birds and the bees." He picked apart politicians, living and dead, mocked

NOTABLE QUOTES FROM VIDAL

"Style is knowing who you are, what you want to say and not giving a damn."

"Half of the American people have never read a newspaper. Half never voted for president. One hopes it is the same half."

"Whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies."

religion and prudery, opposed wars from Vietnam to Iraq and insulted his peers like no other, once observing that the three saddest words in the English language were "Joyce Carol Oates." (The happiest words: "I told you so.")

Ralph Ellison labeled him a "crazy patrician." Vidal had an old-fashioned belief in honor but a modern will to live as he pleased. He wrote in the memoir *Palimpsest* that he had more than 1,000 "sexual encounters"; nothing special, he added, compared to the pursuits of such peers as John F. Kennedy and Tennessee Williams. Vidal was fond of drink and alleged that he had sampled every major drug, once. He never married and for decades shared a scenic villa in Ravello, Italy, with companion Howard Austen.

In print and in person, he was a shameless name-dropper, but what names! John and Jacqueline Kennedy, Hillary Clinton, Tennessee Williams, Mick Jagger, Orson Welles, Frank Sinatra, Marlon Brando, Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, and Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon. A longtime critic of American militarism, Vidal was, ironically, born at the United States Military Academy, his father's alma mater. Vidal grew up in a political family. His grandfather, Thomas Pryor Gore, was a US senator from Oklahoma. His father, Gene Vidal, served briefly in Roosevelt's administration and was an early expert on aviation. Amelia Earhart was a family friend.

Of his output, *Lincoln* is regarded as his most notable work of historical fiction.

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Broadway theaters will dim lights in tribute

By MARK KENNEDY
in New York
The Associated Press

Broadway theaters will dim their marquee lights on Friday night in memory of Gore Vidal, and the cast of his play *The Best Man* will dedicate the next week of performances to the author and playwright.

The Broadway League said on Wednesday the lights will be dimmed for one minute at

exactly 8 pm on Friday. Executive director Charlotte St Martin called Vidal's work both "timely and timeless."

The second revival of his political play *The Best Man* opened in April with strong reviews and a stellar cast that included James Earl Jones, Angela Lansbury, John Larroquette, Candice Bergen, Eric McCormack, Michael McKean and Kerry Butler.

The show currently stars

Cybill Shepherd, John Stamos, Kristin Davis, Mark Blum and Elizabeth Ashley, in addition to Larroquette and Jones.

"I'm honored to have been able to call Gore a close friend," said Shepherd in a statement. "I'm privileged to currently be appearing in his play *The Best Man*, and speaking his witty and eloquent words every night only reinforces for me what a genius he was."

Producer Jeffrey Richards

said there will be an announcement before each show for the next week that it is being dedicated to Vidal. At curtain calls, photos of Vidal will be shown on the monitors.

"Gore Vidal was an original," Richards said in a statement, hailing Vidal for his "grace, distinction, style, wit and wisdom." He added: "For his contribution to American culture, we will always be in his debt."

Set in Philadelphia during a

fictional 1960 national convention, the play pits two candidates vying for the presidential nomination and sees how far they will go to win. The play has been extended twice. It will close on Sept 9 at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre.

"It is filled with poetry about what it means to be human," said Davis in a statement. "We will think of him and everything he contributed to life as we perform his play eight shows a week."