

EALC 3425/7425, GSWS 3425, RELS 3425/7425

## Gender, Religion, and China

Thursdays 12:00-2:59 PM

Williams Hall 843

Instructor: Prof. Hsiao-wen Cheng

East Asian Languages and Civilizations

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2-3, Thursdays 4-5 (Walk-ins are fine, but appointments are highly recommended: <https://calendly.com/hscheng/virtual-15-mins>)

### Course Description and Level

This is an upper-level seminar with substantial reading and written assignment each week. No prior knowledge of China or Chinese history is required. It would be helpful if you have taken a college-level Gender Studies course before.

This course examines the interrelationship among “gender,” “religion,” and “China” as conceptual and historical categories. We ask, for example, how gender plays critical and constitutive roles in Chinese religious traditions, how religion can be used both to reinforce and to challenge gender norms, how religious women impact Chinese society and culture, and what the construction of “China” as a cultural identity and as a nation-state has to do with women, gender, and religion. We will also think about what assumptions we have when speaking of gender, religion, and China, and the infinite possibilities when we strive to think critically and beyond.

We will read three kinds of materials: 1) scholarship on gender and religion in historical and contemporary China and the Chinese-speaking world, 2) scholarship engaging theories and methodology of gender and religious studies not necessarily focused on China, and 3) historical record of religious women in English translation.

This is a seminar, meaning that every participant is an active contributor rather than passive consumer of the class. **Students are expected to finish the readings and think about them before coming to class, bring the readings and your notes and questions to class, and actively engage with other classmates’ questions.** It is also highly encouraged to bring up comparative perspectives based on each of your own knowledge, professional or academic training, and personal experience.

## **Course Assignments**

### **Undergraduate Students (3425):**

Critical Response (30%): On one asterisked reading each week; **eight weeks required**; count the best six. 400-600 words for each essay. Due on Canvas - Discussions **Thursdays at 9:30 AM**.  
**See Canvas – Discussions for guidelines.**

Discussion Leading (5%): One week per person, prepare discussion questions, give a short presentation in the beginning of the class (less than 15 minutes) that summarizes the reading and introduces the questions. **Discuss with the professor about your questions via email or in person at least three days before the class.**

Final Paper (30%): A historiographical essay, that reviews current scholarship on a certain topic relevant to this course; or a research paper, that utilizes both primary and secondary sources to raise a question, discuss it, and make an argument. 10-12 pages, double-spaced (single space for block quotes). Use Chicago or MLA Style for citations. **First draft due Thursday December 7. Use color code to mark all the changes made from the first to the final draft.** Final draft due **Tuesday December 19** on Canvas (in Assignments).

Final Presentation (5%): Oral presentation of the final project, in the last week of class.

Participation (30%): Quality of in-class discussion and overall contribution to the class. Each student has one free unexcused absence.

### **Graduate Students (7425):**

Critical Response (30%): **Ten weeks required**; count the best eight.

Discussion Leading (5%)

**Presentation on Recommended Readings (5%):** One 10-minute presentation on the recommended readings. Discuss with the professor about the selection of readings.

Final Paper (30%): **13-15 pages.**

Final Presentation (5%): Oral presentation of the final project, in the last week of class.

Participation (25%)

## **Course Policies**

- ◆ Extension for any written assignment can and must be requested by email before the original deadline, accompanied by a reasonable new deadline. Response essays should not be delayed for more than a week.
- ◆ Students must turn in all written assignments and attend at least half of the classes in order to pass this class.

## **Useful Resources**

### **Introductions to Chinese History and Religions**

- ♦ Patricia B. Ebrey, *Cambridge Illustrated History of China*. Cambridge University Press, 2010 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), 2022 (3<sup>rd</sup> edition).
- ♦ Stephen F. Teiser, “Religions of China in Practice.” In Donald S. Lopez, Jr. ed, *Asian Religions in Practice* (Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 88-122.
- ♦ Ya-Pei Kuo, “Zongjiao and the Category of Religion in China,” in *Religion, Theory, Critique* (Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 155–162.

### **Reviews of Scholarship on Gender and/or Religion in China:**

- ♦ Emma Jinhua Teng, “The Construction of the ‘Traditional Chinese Woman’ in the Western Academy: A Critical Review.” *Signs* 22.1 (1996): 115-51.
- ♦ Gail Hershatte and Zheng Wang, “Chinese History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis.” *American Historical Review* 113.5 (Dec. 2008): 1404-1421.
- ♦ Beata Grant, “Women, Gender, and Religion in Premodern China: A Selective Bibliography of Secondary Sources in Chinese and Western Languages.” *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in China* 10 (2008): 152-175.
- ♦ Xiaofei Kang, “Women and the Religious Question in Modern China,” in Vincent Goossaert et al. eds., *Modern Chinese Religion II* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 491-559.

### **Overview of Women and Gender in Modern China:**

- ♦ Gail Hershatte, *Women in China’s Long Twentieth Century*. University of California Press, 2007.
- ♦ Gail Hershatte, *Women and China’s Revolutions*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.



## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1 Aug. 31**

#### **Feminist Buddhist Critique**

Alan Sponberg, “Attitudes towards Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism,” in José Ignacio Cabezón ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* (SUNY, 1992) pp. 3-29.

Rita M. Gross, [\*Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism\*](#) (SUNY Press, 1993), chapters 1–3 (pp. 3–27). Grad students should also read chapters 4–7 (pp. 29–121)

Lisa Battaglia, “Toward a Buddhist Feminism: Mahayana Sutras, Feminist Theory, and the Transformation of Sex.” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 3.4 (1997): 8–51.

### **Week 2 Sept. 7**

#### **Postcolonial Feminist Buddhist Critique**

\*Nirmala S. Salgado, *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: In Search of the Female Renunciant* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

Recommended:

Padma'tsho, and Sarah Jacoby, "Gender Equality in and on Tibetan Buddhist Nuns' Terms," *Religions* 11.543 (2020): 1–16.

Hsiao-lan Hu, "The White Feminism in Rita Gross's Critique of Gender Identities and Reconstruction of Buddhism," in *Buddhism and Whiteness: Critical Reflections* (Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 293–308.

5:15–6:15pm Center for East Asian Studies Fall Reception (Fisher Fine Arts Library, 414)

**Week 3 Sept. 14**

**Buddhism and Filiality in Medieval China**

\*Stephen Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton University Press, 1988), Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8.

\*Ping Yao, "Tang Women in the Transformation of Buddhist Filiality," in Jinhua Jia, Xiaofei Kang, and Ping Yao eds., *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body* (SUNY Press, 2014), pp. 25–46.

Recommended:

Winston Kyan, "Female Bodily Sacrifice and the Absence of Men: Representing Filial Offspring in Song, Jin, and Liao Tombs," in Wu Hung and Paul Copp eds., *Refiguring East Asian Religious Art: Buddhist Devotion and Ancestor Veneration* (Chicago: Center for the Art of East Asia, University of Chicago, 2019), pp. 212–237.

Keith N. Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), Introduction, chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, 7.

**Week 4 Sept. 21**

**Birth and Motherhood**

\*Amy Paris Langenberg, *Birth in Buddhism: The Suffering Fetus and Female Freedom* (Routledge, 2017)

\*Jessey Choo, "That Fatty Lump: Discourses on the Fetus, Fetal Development, and Filial Piety in China Before the Eleventh Century CE," *Nan Nü* 14 (2012): 177–211.

Recommended:

Lori Meeks, "Women and Buddhism in East Asian History: The Case of the Blood Bowl Sutra, Part I: China," *Religion Compass* (2019): 1–12.

Lori Meeks, "Women and Buddhism in East Asian History: The Case of the Blood Bowl Sutra, Part II: Japan," *Religion Compass* (2020): 1–13.

Reiko Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 2012), Ch. 8 "What Here Is the Merit, May That Be for My Parents," pp. 180–203.

**Week 5 Sept. 28**

**Female Renunciants in Chinese History**

\*Ding-Hwa Hsieh, "Buddhist Nuns in Sung China," *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 30 (2000): 63–96.

\*Shin-yi Chao, "Good Career Moves: Life Stories of Daoist Nuns of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in China* 10 (2008): 121–151.

\*Hsiao-wen Cheng, *Divine, Demonic, and Disordered: Women without Men in Song Dynasty China* (University of Washington Press, 2021), chapters 5–6.

Anonymous female author, "Fifth Woman Wang," in Wilt Idema transl., *Heroines of Jiangyong: Chinese Narrative Ballads in Women's Script* (University of Washington Press, 2009), pp. 135–167.

**Recommended (Required for grad students):**

Ann Waltner, Review of Beata Grant's *Eminent Nun: Women Chan Masters of Seventeenth-Century China*. *HJAS* 71.1 (2010): 287–294.

\*Ann Waltner, "Life and Letters: Reflections on Tanyangzi." In Joan Judge and Hu Ying eds., *Beyond Exemplar Tales: Women's Biography in Chinese History* (University of California Press, 2011), pp. 212–229, 333–336.

**Week 6 Oct. 5**

**No Class. Meet with the professor individually to discuss final paper topic.**

**Week 7**

**Fall Break**

**Week 8 Oct. 19**

**Analyzing Gender Difference**

\*Steven Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the 'Eternal Mother,'" *Signs* 9.1 (Autumn, 1983): 4–25.

\*Stephanie Balkwill, "The Sutra on Transforming the Female Form: Unpacking an Early Medieval Chinese Buddhist Text," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 44.2 (2016): 127–148.

\*Beata Grant, "Da Zhangfu: The Gendered Rhetoric of Heroism and Equality in Seventeenth-Century Chan Buddhist Discourse Records," *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in China* 10 (2008): 177–211.

\*Rosemary A. Joyce, "Goddesses, Matriarchs, and Manly Hearted Women: Troubling Categorical Approaches to Gender," *Ancient Bodies, Ancient Lives: Sex, Gender, and Archaeology* (Thames & Hudson, 2009), pp. 46–66.

**Due: Paper proposal (including: title, one-paragraph synopsis, & bibliography)**

**Week 9 Oct. 26 (Reschedule or on Zoom)**

## Historicizing Sexuality

- \*James Schultz, "Heterosexuality as a Threat to Medieval Studies," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15.1 (2006): 14–29.
- \*Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), Chapters 1 & 3.
- Hsiao-wen Cheng, "Writing a History of Sexuality for Premodern China," in *Cambridge World History of Sexuality*
- Amy Paris Langenberg, "Sex and Sexuality in Buddhism: A Tetralemma," *Religion Compass* 9.9 (2015): 277–286.

## Week 10 Nov. 2

### Guanyin, Women's Devotion, and Material Culture

- Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformaiton of Avalokitesvara* (Columbia University Press, 2001), **selections**.
- \*Yuhang Li, *Becoming Guanyin: Artistic Devotion of Buddhist Women in Late Imperial China* (Columbia University Press, 2020), Introduction, Chapters 1–3, & Conclusion.

Due (for research papers): Sample analysis of one or two primary sources (2-3 pages)

Due (for historiographical essays): Review/summary of 2-3 items (2-3 pages)

## Week 11 Nov. 9

### Gender, Religion, and the Modernizing Chinese State

- \*Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (University of California Press 2005), Introduction & Chapters 1–2.
- \*Zhang Ni, "Making Religion, Making the New Woman: Reading Su Xuelin's Autobiographical Novel *Jixin* (Thorny Heart)," *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body*, pp. 71–99.
- Mayfair Yang, "Shamanism and Spirit Possession in Chinese Modernity: Some Preliminary Reflections on a Gendered Religiosity of the Body," *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 2 (2015): 51–86.

#### Recommended:

- Mayfair Yang, *Re-enchanting Modernity: Ritual Economy and Society in Wenzhou* (Duke University Press, 2020), chapters 1, 7, 8, 10.

## Week 12 Nov. 16

### Gender, Religion, and the Chinese Communist Revolution

- \*Xiaofei Kang, *Enchanted Revolution: Ghosts, Shamans, and Gender Politics in Chinese Communist Propaganda, 1942–1952* (Oxford University Press, 2023)

Due (for research papers): Review/summary of relevant scholarship (2-3 pages)

Due (for historiographical essays): Review/summary of another 2-3 items (2-3 pages)

**Week 13 TUESDAY Nov. 21**

**The Question of Agency and Religious-Secular Divide, Part I**

Sarah Bracke, “Female Piety and the Concept of Agency” (5-minute video):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MehTuuALvs>

\*Suzanne Cahill, “Discipline and Transformation: Body and Practice in the Lives of Daoist Holy Women of Tang China,” in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (University of California Press, 2003), pp. 251–278.

\*Wai Ching Angela Wong, “Negotiating between Two Patriarchies: Chinese Christian Women in Postcolonial Hong Kong,” *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body*, pp. 157-179.

\*Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16.2 (2001): 202-236.

Recommended:

Fresh Air interview with Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “How Mormon Polygamy in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Fueled Women’s Activism”:

<https://www.npr.org/2017/01/17/510246850/how-mormon-polygamy-in-the-19th-century-fueled-womens-activism>

**Week 14 Nov. 30**

**The Question of Agency and Religious-Secular Divide, Part II**

\*Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden eds., *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference* (Columbia University Press, 2013), part 1 & part 4 (pp. 1–76, 209–279)

**Week 15 Dec. 7**

Final Presentations

Due: Final paper first draft

Final paper final draft due December 19 (Tuesday)



This syllabus is subject to change.