

## Women in Chinese Religions

### Instructor

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### Institution

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### Course Level and Type

Undergraduate class

### Hours of Instruction

3 hours / week; 15 weeks

### Enrollment and Last Year Taught

20 students, Spring 2002

### Course Description

The course examines the images, roles, and experiences of women in Chinese religious traditions (primarily Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism). Discussion issues include: gender norms and roles defined in each religion; attitudes toward women and the feminine (female spiritual capacity and sexuality) in religious doctrine and practice; biographies of exemplary women in Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist literature; women's religious experiences and achievements; and the worship of female deities. The course is lecture with discussion, supplemented with audio-visual presentations. Readings include primary texts in translation and secondary works.

### Required Books

1. Cleary, Thomas, trans. *Immortal Sisters: Secret of Taoist Women*. North Atlantic Books, 1989.
2. Ebrey, Patricia Buckley. *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: U. of California Press, 1993.
3. Kwok, Pui-lan. *Chinese Women and Christianity, 1860-1927*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.
4. Tsai, Kathryn Ann, trans. *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries*. Honolulu: U. of Hawaii Press, 1994.
5. Yü, Chün-Fang. *Kuan-Yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara*. Columbia University Press, 2000.

### Books on Reserve:

- 1) Birge, Bettine. *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yüan China (960-1368)*. Cambridge UP, 2002.
- 2) Gilmartin, Christina K., Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, & White Tyrene, ed. *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*. Harvard U. Press, 1994
- 3) Gregory, Peter N. and Daniel A. Getz, eds., *Buddhism in the Sung*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999.
- 4) Ko, Dorothy. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- 5) Mann, Susan. *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*. Stanford UP, 1997.
- 6) Raphals, Lisa. *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China*. SUNY, 1998.
- 7) T'ien Ju-k'ang. *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times*. E. J. Brill, 1988.
- 8) Young, Serinity. *An Anthology of Sacred Texts by and about Women*. New York: Crossroad, 1994.

## Grades and Class Policies

90-100 = **A** (excellent)  
80-89 = **B** (good)  
70-79 = **C** (average)  
60-69 = **D** (below average)  
Below 60 = **F** (fail)

- Class Attendance, Participation, and Assignments: **15%**
- 3 Short Papers: **60%**
- Quizzes and Final Exam: **25%**

- I. **Class Attendance, Participation, and Assignments** (15%): Each student in turn will be asked to summarize the assigned readings and raise questions for class discussion. In short, class preparation, attendance, and participation are both mandatory and important.
- II. **Three short papers** (60%): 4-5 pages, 12-sized font, and double space. Due at beginning of the class. To be fair to everyone, a late paper is accepted **ONLY** if you turn it in within three days after the deadline. Also, the highest grade of a late paper is B unless you have legitimate reasons with official documents. An excellent paper means 1) a careful and comprehensive study of the readings, 2) a critical and thoughtful way of thinking, 3) an effective respond to the questions, and 4) with clarity and sufficient textual evidence.
- III. **Quizzes** (5%) and **Final** (20%): In-class Exam; questions are drawn from readings, films, and lectures. Formats include multiple-choice, true/false, proper link, and short essay questions.
- IV. **Meeting with Instructor**: You are cordially welcome to visit me during my office hours or by appointment!

Please read the assigned readings before you come to the class.

## Course Schedule

**Mon.**---Course format, purposes, requirements, and readings

**Wed.**---Introduction to Chinese concept of religion and the "Three Teachings"

**Fri.**---Women in Confucian Tradition

Reading: T. Kelleher, "Confucianism," in *Women in World Religions* (SUNY, 1987), **135-159**.

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### **Week 2**

**Mon.**---No Class

**Wed.**---Confucian Prescriptions for Women

Reading: Young, "Confucianism," *An Anthology of Sacred Texts*, **pp. 340-357**.

**Fri.**---Images and Roles of Women in Early Confucian Texts

Reading: Young, "Confucianism," *An Anthology of Sacred Texts*, **pp. 357-363**.

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### **Week 3**

**Mon.**---Confucian Gender Norms and Relations

Reading: Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, **Intro. and Chapter 1**.

**Wed.**---Meanings of Marriage

Reading: Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, **Chapter 2 and 3**.

**Fri.**--- Wedding Ceremony and Procedure

Reading: Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, **Chapter 4 and 5**.

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#### **Week 4**

**Mon.**---Roles and Duties of Women in Traditional Chinese Family (I)

Reading: Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, **Chapters 6 and 8.**

**Wed.**---Roles and Duties of Women in Traditional Chinese Family (II)

Reading: Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, **Chapters 9 and 10.**

**Fri.**--- Remarried Women and Concubines

Reading: Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, **Chapters 11 and 12.**

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#### **Week 5**

**Mon.**---Class Discussion

Reading: Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, **Chapter 15.**

**Wed.**---Confucian Impact on Women: The *Lie-nü* Tradition

Reading: Sung, Marina H. "The Chinese Lieh-nü Tradition." In *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, eds. R. W. Guisso & S. Johannesen. (N. Y.: Philo Press, 1981): **63-74.**

Carlitz, Katherine. "Desire, Danger, and the Body: Stories of Women's Virtue in Late Ming China," in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, **101-124.**

**Fri.**---Foot-binding

Reading: Dorothy Ko, "The Body as Attire: The Shifting Meanings of Footbinding in Seventeenth-Century China," *Journal of Women's History* 8.4 [<http://www.iupjournals.org/jwh/jwh8-4.html>]

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#### **Week 6**

**Mon.**---Class discussion

**Video:** "These shoes weren't made for walking" [26 min.] HQ1767 .T44 1995

**Wed.**---Paper #1 Due and Oral Report

**Paper #1:** Based on the readings (Kelleher, Young, Ebrey, Sung, and Ko) write a thoughtful paper that answers the following questions: 1). What were the expected roles and duties for women in Confucian tradition? 2). On the other hand, provide a feminist interpretation of the history of women in Confucian China as an attempt to dispel the overwhelmingly subordinated images of traditional Chinese women. DO provide textual evidence to support the points.

**Fri.**---Women and Taoism

Reading: Barbara Reed, "Taoism," in *Women in World Religions*, **161-181.**

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#### **Week 7**

**Mon.**---Female Images and Symbols in Taoist Teaching

Reading: Cleary, *Immortal Sisters*, **Translator's Introduction & Young, Anthology, 384-401.**

**Wed.**---Taoist Women (I)

Reading: Cleary, *Immortal Sisters*, **pp. 3-45 (Sun Bu-er).**

**Fri.**---Taoist Women (II)

Reading: Cleary, *Immortal Sisters*, **pp. 57-90.**

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#### **Week 8**

**Mon.**---Class discussion on women in Taoism

**Wed.**--- Paper # 2 Due and Report

**Paper #2:** Based on Reed, Young, and Cleary, write a thoughtful paper that answers the following questions: **1)** What sources of empowerment and inspiration can Taoism provide to women? **2)** What hindrances/discriminations would Taoist women face? Use those Taoist women's biographies as examples to illustrate your points.

**Fri.**---Introduction to Buddhism

Reading: Tsai, trans. *Lives of the Nuns*, pp. 1-16.

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**Week 9** Midterm Break  
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**Week 10**

**Mon.**---Early Chinese Buddhist Nuns (I)

Reading: Tsai, trans. *Lives of the Nuns*, pp. 17-50.

**Wed.**---Early Chinese Buddhist Nuns (II)

Reading: Tsai, trans. *Lives of the Nuns*, pp. 50-86.

**Fri.**--- Early Chinese Buddhist Nuns (III)

Reading: Tsai, trans. *Lives of the Nuns*, pp. 87-106.

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**Week 11**

**Mon.**---Buddhist Nuns in Sung China

Reading: Hsieh, "Buddhist Nuns in Sung China," in *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 30 (2000): 63-97.

**Wed.**---Women in Ch'an/Zen Buddhism

Reading: Hsieh, "Images of Women in Ch'an Buddhist Literature of the Sung Period," in *Buddhism in the Sung*, pp. 148-187.

Levering, Miriam L. "Miao-tao and Her Teacher Ta-hui," in *Ibid.*, pp. 188-219.

Grant, Beata. "Female Holder of the Lineage: Linji Chan Master Zhiyuan Xinggang (1597-1654)." In *Late Imperial China* 17.2 (Dec. 1996): 51-76.

**Fri.**---Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary China

**Video:** "Choice for a Chinese Women: Enlightenment in a Buddhist Convent" BQ647.C46 1993/35 min

Reading: Review by Russel Kirkland in *Education about Asia* 4.1 (Spring 1999), p. 71.

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**Week 12**

**Mon.**---Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Taiwan

Reading: Huang & Weller, "Merit and Mothering: Women and Social Welfare in Taiwanese Buddhism," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57.2 (May 1998): 379-96.

Assignment #1: Write **a 2-page summary and prepare a 3-min report:** Search Website about the life of the nun **Cheng-yen** and the **Tzu-chi** (Ciji) Foundation.

**Wed.**---Paper #3 Due and Oral Report

**Paper #3:** Based on Tsai, Hsieh, Levering, Grant, and information about Tzu-chi/Ciji, provide a critical assessment of women in Buddhist tradition: 1) Is there any significant departure in Buddhist tradition from Confucianism in terms of gender prescriptions and the images of women? 2) Y/N, where, how, and why? Do provide textual evidence from our readings to support the points.

**Fri.**---The Goddess of Compassion (I)

Reading: Yü, *Kuan-yin*, pp. 1-27 and **Chapter 4**.

-----**Week 13**

**Mon.**---The Goddess of Compassion (II)

Reading: Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 6.

**Wed.**---The Goddess of Compassion (III)  
Reading: Yü, *Kuan-yin*, **Chapter 8 and 10.**

**4/12 (Fri.)**--- The Goddess of Compassion (IV)  
Video: "Pilgrimage 1987, Pilgrimages to Tianshu and Putuo" writer/producer Chun-Fang Yu" (BQ6450.C6 P54 1988) [56 min.]  
Reading: Yü, *Kuan-yin*, **Chapter 9.**

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**Week 14**

**Mon.**---Class discussion  
Reading: Yü, *Kuan-yin*, **Chapter 11-12.**

Assignment #2: Write **a 2-page summary and prepare a 3-min report** for the following questions: **1)** What influences did the indigenous Chinese religions (Confucianism & Taoism) have on the feminine transformation of Kuan-yin? **2)** Does the worship of Kuan-yin have positive impact on Chinese women? Y/N, Why?

**Wed.**---Women in Popular Religion  
Reading: Overmyer, Daniel L. "Alternatives: Popular Religious Sects in Chinese Society," in *Modern China* 7.2 (April 1981): **153-190.**  
Overmyer, "Women in Chinese Religions: Submission, Struggle, Transcendence," in Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen, eds., *From Benares to Beijing: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion in Honour of Prof. Jan Yün-hua* (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1991), **pp. 91-120.**

**Fri.**---Women in Christianity (I)  
Reading: Kwok, *Chinese Women and Christianity*, **Chapters Intro., 1 & 2.**

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**Week 15**

**Mon.**---Women in Christianity (II)  
Reading: Kwok, *Chinese Women and Christianity*, **Chapters 3, 4.**

**Wed.**---Class Discussion on Chinese Women and Christianity  
Reading: Kwok, *Chinese Women and Christianity*, **Conclusion.**

**Fri. & Week 16:** Films, Final Review, and Course Evaluation  
We will see some films (such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," "Raise the Red Lantern," etc.) on the portrayals of women in traditional Chinese society and reflect upon all the issues of women and religions we have been studied and discussed.

Assignment #3: Write **a 2-page summary and prepare a 3-min report:** Use what you have learned in this class to critically review and compare the films' approaches to portraying women in traditional China.

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**Pedagogical Reflections:**

This course centers on women in traditional Chinese religions. We start from the two indigenous traditions (Confucianism and Taoism) and then discuss women's experiences in Buddhism and popular religion. We seek to understand in what way and to what extent Taoism, Buddhism, and popular religion differed from the dominant Confucian tradition on gender norms and roles. Although the focus of this course is "women in traditional China," we also read some works on women and religions in contemporary Chinese societies to achieve a more balanced understanding.

Most students who take this course do not have any Chinese background knowledge. It is both important and helpful to clarify what "religion" has meant for Chinese people and to emphasize the distinction between normative prescriptions and real life experiences.

Toward the end of the semester, we see some films on women in traditional China. The films help students to visualize part of the scenes depicted in our readings while also enabling them to compare what we have studied to the portrayals of women in the films.