

Religions and Society in China (introductory course)

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Language of instruction: English

This course provides an introduction to the study of the history, main doctrines, and practices of the major Chinese religions and spiritual practices and is designed to give conceptual tools to appreciate diverse religious practice in China. It covers the development of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and wide range of popular and local religions as well as Chinese mythology. From historical perspective, we will explore the development of key theological, religious and philosophical doctrines as well as associated practices of main spiritual schools from Early to contemporary China. We will analyze the origins, central teachings, divisions and religious branches, rituals and practices, influences on culture, and responses to modern challenges for each tradition. We will cover many topics from religious philosophies and spiritual practices, to rituals, scriptures, gender, religious authority. We also will concentrate on the mystical experience of the followers and syncretic metaphysical doctrines, as well to the hermeneutic difficulties attendant upon the study of Asian religions.

At the end of the course we will discuss the role and apprehension of foreign religions in China, such as Christianity, Islam, Manichaeism, missionary activities and Chinese response to it We will explore new Chinese religions as well as several important topics such as state and religion, fame and religion, politics and religion, state ideology and religions, etc. as dynamic, ongoing forces in the lives of individuals and in the collective experience of modern societies.

Rationale

Chinese religions differ a lot in concepts as well as in the structure from Western teachings. Even the term “zong jiao” (formally “religion”) is translated as “the teaching of ancestors” and in this way it is more concentrated on the family live, local shrines and personal relations with spirits as well as on the personal mystical experience. Institutional religion such as Christianity or Islam

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never played important role in China's development and culture and was just a part of state imperial tradition. Chinese religion is more "teacher-oriented" than "doctrine-oriented" or "institute-oriented", so personal masters, local doctrines, sects and small schools played much more important role than any official religious institution.

Deep syncretism became another important factor melted together several popular beliefs, Buddhist and Taoist practices, Confucian morality.

That's why we will concentrate on the nature of Chinese spirituality and its implementation in different cults and religious schools. We will explore the role of religions in politics, social relations and culture in China in particular. Through discussions, and reading of select primary and secondary sources, we will explore the formulations and subsequent transformations of key beliefs, doctrines, practices, and institutions that characterized specific religious traditions. We will also examine the patterns of interaction among different traditions, the nature of Chinese religious syncretism as well as the general character of religious life in both traditional and modern China

Learning outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- analyze in depth historical and contemporary forms of religious life in China and be able to follow key historical trajectories in relevant socioreligious contexts;
- understand the origins and content of the main religion concepts and doctrines in China as well as main cults and spiritual practices;
- identify and evaluate critically the motives, concerns and methods that distinguish the academic study of East Asian religions known as religious studies from other non-academic approaches to religious belief and practice.
- understand the nature of religious experience in China, structure of religious institutes, schools, main doctrines and ideas;
- read and to use main religious texts from Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, sectarian and popular tradition in China for research and analysis;
- apply main theories about religion to empirical material in traditional and modern China
- evaluate and critically assess the validity of historical sources about Chinese religions and myths and its and interpretations.

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- analyze historical and social roots of modern religious and spiritual life in China, conflicts, contradictions, state-religions and family-religion relations.

Course Requirements

Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites, although some prior knowledge of the theory of religions and Chinese history will be helpful. No knowledge of the Chinese language is required.

Class Attendance & Discussion

Regular class attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to attend class as well as participate in lectures, discussions, and review sessions. Class participation will constitute 20% of the final grade. Each student is allowed a maximum of two (2) and no more than two (2) unexcused absences during the semester. For each unexcused absence thereafter, five (5) points are deducted from your final grade. You are responsible for keeping the professor informed of any situation that prevents you from attending class. Students who have more than 3 unexcused absences will not pass the course

Academic Honesty

Academic Honesty is taken very seriously in this course. Plagiarism or academic dishonesty in any form will result in a failed grade for the project, and possibly for the course. In order to avoid the sanctions applied to cases of academic dishonesty, please make sure that you properly cite all sources that you utilize in your writing, including works that are directly quoted or paraphrased, as well as works used as a source of information. This includes both print and online sources. Your paper submissions must consist of your own writing, and any direct quotations or paraphrasing from other works must be properly cited.

Readings and discussion

You have to read a lot – it's one of the main requirements for the course. Because this is the very short course and we can't cover all topics about Chinese religions during the lectures you have to fill up the gap by intensive readings. To intensify your understanding and to make your life easier I recommend you first of all to catch the main ideas, stages

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of development doctrines and names from the religions life in China. Some details in this case could be dropped.

Students should be prepared to do a fair amount of reading and to confront a number of unfamiliar-looking names and places. If you find yourself confused, or not understanding what we are covering, please do not hesitate to inform me.

Surprise Textbook Quizzes

To check your knowledge of the reading assignments two brief textbook quizzes will be given. They will be made by surprise. A student will be required to answer two key questions, which will explore the essence of the chapters assigned. It will constitute 20% of your grade.

Précis Assignment

A précis is short and concise summary of a scholarly book, chapter of the book or academic papers approximately 1000 words in length.

1. A précis is not a book review or a critique. A précis should capture the essence of a longer argument, summarizing the argument, theory and data presented by the work's author.
2. You can criticize, approve, agree or disagree with the shown material. In any case essay should have a critical design and reflect your independent thinking. Any thesis or statement should be proved by historical or socio-cultural analysis.
3. It's better to concentrate in several most important ideas than to try to write "in general". Be brief, laconic, and specific in developing your ideas

Précis should be due by the end of the course!!!

You can ask for the recommended book from me or you can propose the book by yourself

Grading

Requirements for obtaining credits (assessment structure)

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Attendance and Class Participation	20%
Sudden Quiz	20 %
Group Discussion and readings	30 %
Short Essay (Précis)	30 %

Reading

Required Texts

1. Poceski, Mario. *Introducing Chinese Religions*. Routledge, 2009.

You can also get this book in the e-book format (titled «Chinese Religions») here:

<http://worldreligionsebooks.com/eBooks/chineseReligions/>

Students can use either version of the book.

3. You can listen the part of this course at <https://www.coursera.org/learn/religions-society-china> (please, take into consideration that it is just a simplified version for non-professional audience)

Supplementary material and additional reading

Although most of the readings will be in the textbooks, in several instances we will draw on outside readings.

For some topics, it will be helpful to read some additional materials to deepen your knowledge and to apprehend different approaches to the same issues.

You are expected to do all the assigned reading **prior** to all classes and do it in a way that will allow you to raise critical questions and actively participate in the discussions. You should also bring your books to class (in digital form), since we will discuss the readings

1. Ch'en, Kenneth (Kuan Sheng). *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*. Princeton University Press, 1972.

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2. Chan Kim-kwong and Graeme Lang ‘Religious Diversity and the State in China’ in: A. Dawson, ed. 2015. *The Politics and Practice of Religious Diversity*. London/New York: Routledge, for Section II: Framing the State). pp.82-98.
3. *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773*. Eds. Charles E. Ronan, SJ. Bonnie B. C. Oh., Loyola Pr, 1988.
4. Komjathy, Louis. *The Daoist Tradition: An Introduction*. A&C Black, 2013.
5. Lagerwey, John. *Religion and Chinese Society* (2 vols.). Chinese University Press, 2003
6. Littlejohn, Ronnie. *Confucianism: An Introduction*. I.B.Tauris, 2010.
7. Littlejohn, Ronnie. *Daoism: An Introduction*. I. B. Tauris, 2009.
8. Lopez Jr., Donald S. *Religions of China in Practice*. Princeton University Press, 1996.
9. Sommer, Deborah, ed. *Chinese Religion: An Anthology of Sources*. Oxford UP, 1995.
10. Yao, Xinzhong. *Chinese Religion: A Contextual Approach*. A&C Black, 2010.

		Lectures	Discussion
1	Introduction to the studies of Religions in China. Religious ritual and mystical experience in China	1	
2	Taoism in Chinese society: main traditions and religious practices	1	
3	Confucianism in Chinese society: from sacrality to morality	1	
4	Buddhism in the Chinese Tradition	1	1
5	Chinese popular religions and Chinese Mythology	1	1
6	Religions in Contemporary China	1	1

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1. Introduction to the studies of Religions in China. Religious ritual and mystical experience in Early China

1.1. Main ideas and key concepts of Chinese Religions

1.2. Religions, Ancestors and Family

1.3. The role of teacher and school in the Chinese Religious Tradition. Locality in religious practice

1.4. Syncretism of Chinese religious tradition

1.5. Religious practice, divinations and worship in China. Earliest forms of religious life in China

1.6. Religious political culture: shamanism, mediumism and ruler

1.7 Ecstatic functionaries in Chinese religions

1.8. Religious ritual and cultural continuity

Reading

Poceski, Introduction, ch. 1 , pp. 1-13, 21-25

Yao, Xinzhong. Chinese Religion: A Contextual Approach. A&C Black, 2010., p. 1-44, 17-182

Additional reading

Paper, Jordan D. The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion. State University of New York Press, 1995. pp. 23-83, 125-188

2. Taoism in Chinese society: main traditions and religious practices

2.1. Idea of Dao and its manifestations

2.2. Lao-zi, Zhuang-zi and the Beginning of Taoism

2.3. Taoism and the Natural Order of Universe. School of Huang-Lao

4.1. Taoism and the Quest for of Immortality

4.2. School of Celestial masters and advent of Taoism as Institutional religion

4.3. Alchemy in Taoism

4.4. Taoist Practices and Main Cults: Mind and Body training

4.6. Main Schools in Taoism (Shangqing, Lingbao, Quanzhen, etc.)

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4.7. Modern Taoism

Reading

Poceski, ch. 3, pp 52-71, ch. 4, pp. 76-102

Sommer 71–83

Additional reading

Komjathy, Louis. *The Daoist Tradition: An Introduction*. A&C Black, 2013. ch. 1, 4

3. Confucianism in Chinese society: from sacrality to morality

5.1. Classical Confucian Tradition

5.2. Main Ideas and Principles

5.3. Confucianism as religion

5.4. Confucian Canon and ritual practice

Reading

- Poceski, ch. 2;

Additional reading

Littlejohn, Ronnie. *Confucianism: An Introduction*. I.B.Tauris, 2010, pp, 28-57

4. Buddhism in the Chinese Tradition

4.1. Basic Principles of Buddhism. Buddha and Buddhahood

4.2. Fundamental division: Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana

4.3. Transition to China: Missionaries and Translators.

4.4. Sinified Buddhism as an almost independent tradition. Chinese Tripitaka

4.5. Chinese schools of Buddhism: Huayan, Tienitai, Zhenyan

4.6. Buddhist order and training. Meditation and everyday life

4.7. Buddhism in Art and Culture

4.8 Popular Buddhism and cults in traditional and Modern China

4.9. Institutional Buddhism in Modern China

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Reading

Poceski, ch 5, pp. 103-128, ch. 6 142-147, 152-156

Additional reading

Buddhism in China: pp. 21-94, 184-213, 241-258, 297-338, 365-388

Discussion (beside Poceski's book you have to read recommended original texts prior to discussion)

Topic: Chan (Zen) Buddhism: doctrine and practice. Chan influence to Chinese culture

Topic: Religious Syncretism. Buddhist-Taoist complex and practices

Reading

- Poceski, ch. 6, 131-141
- Poceski, ch. 8, 183-204

5. Chinese Mythology and Chinese popular religions

5.1. Main Themes, and Concepts of Chinese Mythological World

5.2. Creator Deities. Progenitor Deities. Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors

5.3.. Lunar and Solar myth in China. Cosmological Deities

5.4. Myth, Hero and Tribe.

5.5. Basics of Chinese popular (Folk) Religions. The Idea of Salvation in Chinese Popular Religion

5.6. Ancestor worship, temples, festivals and communal identities

5.7. Sectarianism and Syncretism. Heterodox sects, Millenarian Movements and secret societies

Discussion (you have to read recommended original texts prior to discussion)

Topic: Popular Religions and sectarianism in Modern Chinese Society

Reading

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Poceski, ch. 1, pp. 13-20

Poceski, ch. 7; pp. 157-182

Additional reading

Yang, Deming An Lihui. Handbook of Chinese Mythology. Oxford University Press, USA, 2008., p. 1-76

6. Religions in Contemporary China

6.1 Buddhism and Taoism in Modern China

6.2. Religion and Family in China

6.3. Religion and State in Modern China

6.4. Managing religions in China

6.5. Chinese religions in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore

6.6. Foreign religions in China Mechanisms of the adaptation of foreign religions in China

6.7. Apprehension of the concept of «God» in China. Islam in China and Christianity in Modern China

6.8. Modern Western Religions in China

6.9. Chinese religions in the West

Reading

- Poceski, ch. 9, 209-235
- Poceski, ch. 10, pp. 236-261

Discussion (you have to read recommended papers prior to discussion)

Topic: Religious freedom, faith and family in Modern China

Additional reading

- Chan Kim-kwong and Graeme Lang 'Religious Diversity and the State in China' in : A. Dawson, ed. 2015. The Politics and Practice of Religious Diversity. London/New York: Routledge, for Section II: Framing the State). pp.82-98.
- Chan, Kim-Kwong, and Eric R. Carlson. Religious freedom in China: policy, administration, and regulation; a research handbook. SourceNet, 2005.

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- Yao, Xinzong. Chinese Religion: A Contextual Approach. A&C Black, 2010., pp.103-144