Religion 232—Religions of China: the Ways and their Power

Course Description

In this course we examine the religious worlds of China from antiquity to the present. Not only will we read key works of Chinese philosophy from the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions; we will also investigate how these traditions find expression in art and architecture, poetry and prose, and in the lived realities of Chinese history.

In this exploration of Chinese religions we will pay special attention to the question of what “counts” as religion, to the role of the state in defining and establishing Chinese religions, and to the power of new religious movements to intervene dramatically (and sometimes violently) in Chinese history.

Course Objectives

· To become acquainted with the history of Chinese religions from the beginnings to the present
· To engage with Chinese textual and artistic traditions both critically and empathetically
· To articulate the importance of religion for understanding East Asian art, history, and culture
· To think through Chinese religious ideas and practices in fruitful dialogue with your own values

Responsibilities

· Participation in the course is essential. Participation does not mean simply attending class and handing in written assignments. Participation means active involvement in discussion. One need not know all the answers to speak up; the classroom is a space where questions are especially valued. Come to every class prepared with your insights and your questions. It will be assumed that all students will have completed the session’s reading BEFORE arriving to class. You may be called on at any time to contribute to the class with your ideas and questions.
· This class features close readings of important primary sources. To help guide our discussions you will write five 2-3 page critical reflection essays. In these essays you will engage deeply with Chinese religious texts. The quality of our discussions will be determined, in large part, by how seriously you take the task of reading and writing each week.
· The centerpiece of the class will be a final substantive paper, 10–15 pages in length, exploring some aspect of Chinese religions and making use of both primary sources and relevant scholarship. The paper should be much more than a book report; it should reflect both your ability to do library research and your ability to synthesize data and make your own arguments about the material. The paper will be written in three phases:
  · A 1-3 page proposal for the final paper. The proposal should contain a brief summary of the paper’s topic along with an annotated bibliography of sources you have consulted and plan to consult.
  · A complete rough draft of the final paper (10–15 pages). The more complete and polished the draft, the more likely you are to produce an excellent final draft.
  · The final paper (10–15 pages) will be due Wednesday, 11 May, 12 PM.
Grading

Attendance and participation: 25%
Critical reflection essays: 5 x 5% = 25%
PAPER proposal + bibliography: 5%
PAPER rough draft: 15%
FINAL paper: 30%

Course Policies

Course website and syllabus updates: The Lotus Sūtra teaches us about upāyakauśalya, “skillfulness in expedient pedagogical techniques.” In the Buddhist tradition, good pedagogy is adaptive, adjusting to the proclivities and needs of particular students. As the semester progresses, I may make changes to the syllabus to ensure that our collective efforts are fruitful. If I do make changes to the syllabus, you will be notified via email, via the course website, and in an announcement in class. Pay close attention to the course website for updates and announcements!

Decorum: Texting, cell phone conversations, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Tinder, Yik-Yak, &c. &c. are simply not welcome in the classroom. If you feel compelled to surrender your privacy to rapacious Silicon Valley marketeers, please do so outside our sacred halls of learning. With that said, you are free to use laptops or tablets, and I will not monitor, parent, or police you in any way. I assume you are mature and responsible enough to come to the classroom prepared and focused.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources located in North College, room 021, or call 860-685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Extracurriculars & Scheduling Conflicts: This syllabus contains the relevant deadlines for major assignments. You must notify me by the second week of the term about any known or potential extracurricular conflicts (such as religious observances, graduate or medical school interviews, or team activities). If you have a conflict on the due date of an assignment, I am happy to accept an assignment turned in ahead of time. I will not accept assignments which are late due to extracurricular scheduling conflicts. It is your responsibility to turn in the assignment on or before the due date.

Academic Honesty and Honorable Conduct: As a member of the Wesleyan community, you are expected to follow the Wesleyan Student Honor Code. I take very seriously my commitment to teaching you the scholarly values of proper citation and attribution. Accordingly, I will report all incidents of suspected academic dishonesty—without exception—to the Honor Board. If you have any questions about the proper citation practices, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Late Assignments: Critical reflection essays guide our discussion for the next class session. They are always due at 5 PM the evening before our class. Late reflections are deducted one point per 4 hours late. You are permitted one “reschedule” per semester for a missed critical reflection. Other assignments (proposal, draft, and final paper) are deducted one letter grade per day late.
RELI 232—Religions of China (Spring 2016)  Dr. Ryan Richard Overbey
TTh 10:30–11:50  roverbey@wesleyan.edu
41 Wyllys Ave. #114  Office hours: W 09:00–10:00; Th 09:00–10:00 @ 171 Church Street, Room 206

**Required books**


This book is also available in electronic form as *Chinese Religions: the eBook.* You can access this volume for free through Wesleyan's library. [Click this link.](#)

**Recommended books**


**Course Outline**

**Th 21 January: Introductions**

Lopez Introduction [pp. 3–37]

**T 26 January: LECTURE: Religion in the Shāng 商 and Zhōu 周**

Poceski ch. 1

*Recommended reading:* Ebrey ch. 1

**Th 28 January: SEMINAR: Readings in Shāng 商 and Zhōu 周 Religion**

Lopez ch. 1

de Bary ch. 1; pp. 318–325


**T 2 February: LECTURE: Classical Confucianism**

Poceski ch. 2

*Recommended reading:* Ebrey ch. 2
Th 4 February: SEMINAR: Readings in some Chinese classics
   de Bary ch. 2; pp. 325–346

T 9 February: SEMINAR: Readings in the Analects
   de Bary ch. 3

Th 11 February: SEMINAR: Readings in Mèngzǐ 孟子 and Xúnzǐ 荀子
   de Bary ch. 6

T 16 February: LECTURE: Philosophical “Daoism”
   Poceski ch. 3

Th 18 February: SEMINAR: Readings in the Dàodéjīng 道德經 and the Zhuàngzǐ 莊子
   de Bary ch. 5

T 23 February: LECTURE: Religion in early imperial China
   de Bary ch. 8

   Recommended reading: Ebrey ch. 3

Th 25 February: SEMINAR: Readings in Qín 秦 and Hàn 漢 religion
   Lopez ch. 18
   de Bary ch. 9

T 1 March: LECTURE: Buddhism comes to China

   Final paper proposal + bibliography due at beginning of class!
   Poceski ch. 5

   Recommended reading: Ebrey ch. 4

Th 3 March: SEMINAR: Readings in early Chinese Buddhism
   Lopez chs. 19, 28
   de Bary ch. 15
5 March–20 March: *No class—Spring Break!*

**T 22 March: LECTURE: Religious Daoism**

Poceski ch. 4

**Th 24 March: SEMINAR: Readings in early medieval Daoist texts**

Lopez chs. 2, 9, 11, 13, 27

**T 29 March: LECTURE: Developments in Chinese Buddhism**

Poceski ch. 6

*Recommended reading:* Ebrey ch. 5

**Th 31 March: SEMINAR: Readings in Chinese Buddhism**

Lopez ch. 30

de Bary pp. 471–476; 481–529

**T 5 April: LECTURE: The Neoconfucian Revival**

Poceski ch. 8


*Recommended reading:* Ebrey ch. 6

**Th 7 April: SEMINAR: Readings in Neoconfucian Texts**

de Bary ch. 20

**T 12 April: LECTURE: Religion in Late Imperial China**

Poceski ch. 7

Goossaert & Palmer ch. 1 [pp. 19–42]

*Recommended reading:* Ebrey chs. 7–9

**Th 14 April: SEMINAR: Readings in Chinese Popular Religion**

Lopez chs. 4, 16, 22, 34
T 19 April: LECTURE: The rise of the PRC and Chinese religion

*Rough draft of final paper due at beginning of class!*

*Goossaert & Palmer* chs. 2–4 [pp. 43–122]

*Recommended reading:* Ebrey ch. 10

Th 21 April: SEMINAR: *The Religious Question in Modern China, Part I*

*Goossaert & Palmer* chs. 5–7 [pp. 123–200]

*Recommended reading:* Ebrey ch. 11

T 26 April: LECTURE: Religion in China today

*Goossaert & Palmer* chs. 8–10 [pp. 201–270]

*Recommended reading:* Ebrey ch. 12

Th 28 April: SEMINAR: *The Religious Question in Modern China, Part II*

*Goossaert & Palmer* chs. 11–13 + conclusion [pp. 271–404]

T 3 May: Final thoughts

Students should come with a brief (5 minutes or fewer) presentation on their final paper, and be prepared to ask and answer questions about your projects!

*Wednesday, 11 May, 12 PM: Final paper due via email*