

RE230C—Religions of China

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

Literacies in the Major Learning Outcomes

This course will introduce and reinforce key literacies in the Religious Studies curriculum. These include:

Information Literacy

You will learn to cite primary and secondary sources in the *Chicago Manual of Style* citation system.

You will learn how to recognize the purpose and value of different kinds of information, including distinguishing between primary and secondary sources.

You will contribute to the creation of new information by gathering evidence from primary and secondary sources to construct arguments and test hypotheses, synthesizing information into an essay

Oral Literacy

You will participate in discussion, cogently express your ideas, and respond to others respectfully and effectively

Technology Literacy

You will effectively select and use tools to produce complex, professional printed documents.

You will use tools like Slack and Zoom to work effectively in a remote-learning environment.

Visual Literacy

You will look in a sustained way so as to carefully describe an image or object, noting formal qualities distinct from content.

You will learn how to situate images and objects in their historical contexts, aware of distinctions between representation and presence.

Forming a Community in a Global Pandemic

Before we get to all the cool stuff we'll be doing together in this class, and all the hard work we will put into it, let's start with some brutal honesty. We begin our Spring 2021 in the middle of a global pandemic. Particularly in the United States, COVID-19 has brought to the surface profound issues: inadequate public health infrastructure; drastic economic, social, and racial inequality; staggering political polarization; and disagreement and rancor over the most basic questions.

My primary job as a teacher at this moment in time is to make sure we as a class are able to come together to support each other as a community. We need to get to know each other as people, learn to think and debate and grow intellectually together, and practice respect, kindness, and care for one another.

I promise to do everything I can to make our learning in this class rigorous, engaging, and sometimes even fun! In return, I ask you to promise to let me know what is working and what is not, and to not be shy about reaching out to me if you are facing challenges or need some extra time or help. We are in this together—let's create an awesome community and help each other learn as much as we can.



Our Work Together

Skidmore College requires me to assign you a grade for this course. From my own perspective as a teacher, *grades are basically evil and they work only to divide and disrupt our community of learning*. They corrupt us, pollute our motivations, and remove the joy from education.

To help reduce the anxiety and stress created by grades, in this course we will implement “contract grading.” This is a system whereby you have considerable freedom over the quantity and quality of the work you want to complete. An “A” grade will be the result of a significant amount of solid work. A “B” or a “C” grade will be the result of a choice to spend your time on other things. My hope is that you will all get “A”s because you are thrilled to engage fully in the class, but let’s be honest here. You may not find the course as exciting as you hoped, or you may find yourself overwhelmed by work in other courses. With contract grading you have some power over the amount of time and effort you want to invest in this course, and this is reflected in the final grade you earn. If we must have grades, it is best to give you some power and agency in this unseemly business.

Here is the work we’ll do to learn together as a community:

Responsibilities

- ***Participation*** in the course is essential. This is a remote course, so there are lots of ways to participate. If you are an extrovert, one way to participate is to consistently show up to our synchronous class meetings and help us move the conversation forward by asking interesting questions, responding to your professor and your classmates, and generally keeping the ball rolling. If you are an introvert, or if you can’t make our synchronous meetings, you should keep the asynchronous conversation moving on the Slack by posting questions and responses for the readings and lectures. For the purposes of contract grading, let’s consider a “class day with a solid conversation contribution or Slack post” to be the key unit of measurement here.
- One of the biggest initial hurdles to students grappling with Chinese texts and traditions is the large number of vocabulary terms, unfamiliar place names, names and dates for historical persons, and so on. To enable us to read our sources more fluently and confidently, we will feature ***terminology quizzes***. These should also prove useful in your preparations for the final exam. At regular intervals throughout the semester I will offer six quizzes with five questions each, for a total of 30 possible correct quiz answers.
- In this class we will learn how to read, analyze, and discuss Chinese *written textual materials* and *visual materials*. You will have an opportunity to dive deeper into Chinese religious art and Chinese religious texts with ***reflection essays*** (usually 750–1500 words each), in which you deeply engage with images and ideas.
- At the end of the semester we will have a ***final examination***, allowing you the opportunity to synthesize and master the material learned in this course. The exam will feature multiple choice, word identification, short answer, and essay questions, depending on the grade you are shooting for.

Grading

Category	“C” level	“B” level	“A” level
Participation	10 days with a post or discussion contribution	15 days with a post or discussion contribution	20 days with a post or discussion contribution
Terminology Quizzes	10 correct quiz answers	15 correct quiz answers	20 correct quiz answers
Reflection Essays	1 art reflection + 1 text reflection	2 art reflections + 1 text reflection	2 art reflections + 2 text reflections
Final Exam	Score 50–79% on final exam	Score 80–100% on final exam	Score 80–100% on final exam + satisfactorily complete take-home final essay

Course Policies

Course website and syllabus updates: The *Lotus Sūtra* teaches us about *upāyakaūśalya*, “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, Tiktok, Instagram, Tinder, &c. &c. are simply not welcome during class time. If you feel compelled to surrender your privacy to rapacious Silicon Valley marketeers and to contribute to the corrosive forces of what Shoshana Zuboff calls “surveillance capitalism,” please do so outside our sacred halls of learning. If you engage in our synchronous class discussions, I strongly urge you to do so with all notifications, email, text messages, etc. turned off and with web browsers shut off. Show up to class only when you are ready to be fully present and engaged with our community.

Diversity and Inclusion: Skidmore College is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive community in which members develop their abilities to live in a complex and interconnected world. Consistent with our educational mission, we recognize ourselves as a community that respects individual identities based on varying sociocultural characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, national origin, first language, religious and spiritual tradition, age, ability, socioeconomic status and learning style. We strive to create a socially just world that honors the dignity and worth of each individual, and we seek to build a community centered on mutual respect and openness to ideas—one in which individuals value cultural and intellectual diversity and share the responsibility for creating a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment. We recognize that our community is most inclusive when all members participate to their full capacity in the spirited and sometimes challenging conversations that are at the center of the college’s educational mission.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Skidmore College 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. If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator of Student Access Services (mhegener@skidmore.edu). You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 to contact Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center. Please remember that *it is in your interest to initiate these conversations and request accommodation at the beginning of the semester!*

Title IX: Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal and state regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and options for reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, the Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates (anonymous) are all options available.

More information can be found at the Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct website or by contacting the Title IX Coordinator, Joel Aure (jaure@skidmore.edu), 580-5708, or Deputy Coordinator for Student Affairs, Gabriela Melillo

RE230C.001—Religions of China (Spring 2021)
TTh 8:10–9:30
Online

Dr. Ryan Richard Overbey
roverbey@skidmore.edu
Office hours: Th 13:00–15:00 + by appointment

(gmelillo@skidmore.edu), 580-5022.

Extracurriculars & Religious Observances: This syllabus contains the relevant deadlines for 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 sports activities). If you have a conflict on the due date of an assignment or exam, it is your responsibility to notify me well in advance to work out an alternative date for the assignment or exam. *I will not accept assignments which are late due to extracurricular scheduling conflicts unless you have rescheduled with me well in advance.* It is your responsibility to communicate and plan with your professor.

Academic Honesty and Honorable Conduct: As a member of the Skidmore community, you are expected to follow the [Skidmore 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 Associate Dean of the Faculty. **All instances of plagiarism, no matter how “minor,” will result in failure on the assignment, with the possibility of failure in the course.** If you need to familiarize yourself with the norms of citation and academic integrity, please take a look at Skidmore’s very helpful [Academic Integrity Handbook](#). *If you have any questions about the proper citation practices, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

S/CR/U Grade Option: If you are interested in the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/CR/U) grade option, you are responsible for being aware of the pertinent deadlines set by the Registrar’s Office for choosing this option. Please be advised that the college criterion for “Satisfactory” is the equivalent of a C or better. A grade of “C-,” “D+,” or “D” will result in a grade of CR (“Credit”). Any grade below “D” will result in the student receiving the grade of “Unsatisfactory” or “U” and, as a consequence, the student will receive no credit for the course.

Late Assignments: We are doing a contract grading system this semester. This means you are responsible for organizing your own schedule and working at the pace that makes the most sense for you. There will be regular quizzes throughout the semester which you may opt to take; once the window for a quiz is over there is no opportunity to retake it. The final exam is also taking place in a specific time-window spanning several days, and there is no makeup opportunity if you miss the final exam. Essays must all be submitted by the last day of class to count for credit towards your final grade. *Reach out to me via my office hours if you want to chat about building a solid plan for completing your work!*

Required books

Johnson, Ian. *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2017. ISBN: 9780141986081 — this should be purchased from the bookstore or online!

Poceski, Mario. *Chinese Religions: the eBook*. Providence, Utah: JBE Online Books, 2009. ISBN: 0980163331

Course Outline

Emoji key:

 Synch day (class meets on Zoom)

 Asynch day (no meeting). On asynch days, please do readings and post questions and responses to course Slack!

 **Time-specific assignment today!**

 Readings (to be completed before start of class)

T 2 February: Introductions

We will do some icebreakers, go over the syllabus, and get familiar with some of the tech tools we'll be using in this course.

Th 4 February: Religion in the Shāng 商 and Zhōu 周

 **Post a selfie with a self-introduction to our #selfies Slack channel!**

 Poceski chapter 1, “Early Patterns of Chinese Religious Life.”

T 9 February: Readings in Shāng and Zhōu Religions

 Eno, Robert. “Deities and Ancestors in Early Oracle Inscriptions.” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 41–51. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Th 11 February: Classical Confucianism

 Poceski chapter 2, “The Classical Confucian Tradition”

T 16 February: Readings in Classical Confucianism

 **Quiz 1 Available**

 Slingerland, Edward, trans. *Confucius Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003.

Read Book 1 and Book 2, pp. 1–16.

Th 18 February: Early Daoism

 Poceski chapter 3, “Early Texts and the Emergence of Religious Daoism”

T 23 February: Readings in Early Daoist Thought

 Ryden, Edmund, trans. *Daodejing*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Pick 5 chapters to read and be prepared to discuss!

 Watson, Burton, trans. *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*. Translations from the Asian Classics. New York: Columbia

University Press, 2013.

Read chapters 1–3, pp. 1–21.

Th 25 February: Medieval Daoism

 Poceski chapter 4, “Daoist Traditions and Practices”

T 2 March: Readings in Early Medieval Daoism

 **Quiz 2 Available**

 Bokenkamp, Stephen. “Declarations of the Perfected.” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 166–179. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

 Kroll, Paul W. “Seduction Songs of One of the Perfected.” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 180–187. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

 Bokenkamp, Stephen. “Answering a Summons.” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 188–202. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Th 4 March: Buddhism Comes to China

 Poceski chapter 5, “Spread and Flourishing of Buddhism in China”

T 9 March: Readings in Chinese Buddhism

 Sharf, Robert H. “*The Scripture on the Production of Buddha Images.*” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 261–267. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

 Sharf, Robert H. “*The Scripture in Forty-Two Sections.*” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 360–371. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Th 11 March: Chinese Buddhist Developments

 Poceski chapter 6, “Schools and Practices of Chinese Buddhism”

T 16 March: No Class — Break Day!

Th 18 March: Film: Edward Burger’s *One Mind*

 **Quiz 3 Available**

T 23 March: “Popular” Religion

 Poceski chapter 7, “Popular Religion”

Th 25 March: Readings in “Popular” Religion

 Zito, Angela. “City Gods and their Magistrates.” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 72–81. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

 DeBernardi, Jean. “Teachings of a Spirit Medium.” In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 229–238. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

T 30 March: Neo-Confucianism

 Poceski chapter 8, “Later Transformations of Confucianism”

Th 1 April: Readings in Neo-Confucianism

 Wang, Robin R. “Zhou Dunyi’s *Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained (Taijitu shuo)*: A Construction of the Confucian Metaphysics.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, no. 3 (July 2005): 307–323.

T 6 April: Chinese Christianity and Islam

 Quiz 4 Available

 Poceski chapter 9, “Christianity, Islam, and other ‘Western’ Religions”

Th 8 April: Readings in Chinese Christianity and Islam

 de Bary, Wm. Theodore and Richard Lufrano, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Volume II: From 1600 through the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Read chapter 27, “Chinese Responses to Early Christian Contacts,” pp. 142–154.

 Frankel, James D. *Rectifying God’s Name: Liu Zhi’s Confucian Translation of Monotheism and Islamic Law*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011.

Read chapter 6, “Allah’s Chinese Name,” pp. 155–179.

T 13 April: The End of the Empire

 Poceski chapter 10, “Religion in Modern China”

 Johnson, Part I [pp. 3–67]

RE230C.001—Religions of China (Spring 2021)
TTh 8:10–9:30
Online

Dr. Ryan Richard Overbey
roverbey@skidmore.edu
Office hours: Th 13:00–15:00 + by appointment

 **Th 15 April: *The Souls of China***

 Johnson, Part II [pp. 71–120]

 **T 20 April: The Rise of the PRC and the Mao Era**

 **Quiz 5 Available**

 Johnson, Part III [pp. 123–189]

 **Th 22 April: *The Souls of China***

 Johnson, Part IV [pp. 193–247]

 **T 27 April: Post-Mao Religion in the PRC**

 Johnson, Part V [pp. 251–295]

 **Th 29 April: *The Souls of China***

 Johnson, Part VI [pp. 299–343]

 **T 4 May: Parting Thoughts**

 **Quiz 6 Available**

 Johnson, Part VII + Epilogue [pp. 347–400]

 **T 11 May: Final Exam due by 17:00 Eastern Time**