



# The Beijing Center

北京中国学中心

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## Spring 2019 TBC 2500 Religions in China

Credit Hours: 3.0

Class Times and Location: 1:30 to 4:15 pm Wednesdays

Instructor: Ian Johnson

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### Course Description

This course will explore the contemporary social situation of China's major religions by reading texts, visiting places of worship and discussing issues with practitioners. The goal is to see how China's religious life is unfolding at the grassroots level, and how it affects Chinese society.

Chinese society is increasingly driven by the twin forces of State power and spiritual curiosity. The historical development of the country has been marked by encounters between authorities and social actors of many sorts, more recently by groups who take their direction from religion.

While other courses in the TBC curriculum look at the history of religions in China, this class will examine recent and current challenges to the way religion is practiced.

We will spend time looking at the five authorized religions in China, as well as case studies to look at trends and directions away from the mainline spiritual establishment. We will look at sects; at how worship has been practiced historically and locally; and why religious revival in China is occurring at the grassroots level more and more often.

We will read relevant texts, and we will examine places of worship and speak with practitioners to arrive a more comprehensive understanding of religious renaissance in Chinese society.

### Learning Outcome

This course looks at the complex interaction of society and religion in contemporary China. By seeing places of worship, talking to practitioners and reading relevant texts, students will gain a nuanced understanding of contemporary Chinese religious life.

Some of the key topics to be explored and questions to be answered are:

- the formal theory that the Party uses to organize religious life versus the informal networks that actually guide much religious life. Examples to be explored here include the persistence of unregistered Daoist priests or churches and the growth of hermits, all of which are illegal but exist either with or without the Party's knowledge. Why are these networks and the practices they embrace tolerated in some cases or pushed aside in other instances?

- the unregulated existence of what is arguably China's largest religion, folk religion, which includes the worship of local gods, ancestors and geographic features. Why does the Party not formally register such practices and what are the results of this policy?
- tensions between commerce and religion; some places of worship in China exist primarily as tourist attractions. How do practitioners deal with this?
- in some cases, religious belief and practice can take on a political hue and become a form of dissent. While this colors much of the West's view of religious life in China (i.e. reports of crackdowns on places of worship), how common is this? When it does occur, are there common points between faiths?

## Textbooks

### Required textbook:

--*The Religious Question in Modern China*. Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2011.)

--*The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village*. Henrietta Harrison. (University of California Press. 2013.)

--*The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao* Ian Johnson (Pantheon. 2017)

## Course Requirements

### 1. Course readings

(the following list does not include government documents and newspapers articles that the professor will make available). Students who find themselves unable to procure this material should contact the professor at least one week in advance of the assigned time for these readings.

--"Two Temples, Three Religions and a Tourist Attraction" by Xiaofei Kang, *Modern China*, Volume 35 Number 3, May 2009 227-255.

--"The Spiritual Land Rush: Merit and Morality in New Chinese Buddhist Temple Construction" by Gareth Fisher. *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 67, No. 1 (February) 2008: 143-170.

--"The Red, Black and Grey Markets of Religion in Post-Mao China" by Yang Fenggang. *Sociological Quarterly*, 2006, 93-122.

--"Popular Religion in Contemporary China" by Fan Lizhu. *Social Compass* 2003; 50; 449.

--"Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China" by Pitman B. Potter. *China Quarterly*, No. 174, pp. 317-337

--"The Politics of Legitimation and the Revival of Popular Religion in Shaanbei, North-Central China" by Adam Yuet Chau. *Modern China*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 236-278.

--"Chinese Protestant Christianity Today" by Daniel H. Bays. *China Quarterly*, No. 174, pp. 488-504.

--"Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State: An Ethnographic Account of Church-State Relations in China's Economic Transition" by Nanlai Cao. *Sociology of Religion* 2007, 68: 45-66.

--"Two Sides of a Mountain: Commerce and Belief in China." Ian Johnson. *Journal of Daoist Studies*. 2012.

### 2. Attendance Policy

Students are required to attend class. Course work (including weekly quizzes) cannot be made up except in the case of a serious medical emergency documented in writing and approved by the TBC administration.

### 3. Grading

- a) Weekly quizzes/class participation (30%). Quiz will cover assigned reading material for that week (including news items of relevance to the course).
- b) Mid-term (30%). Will encompass material in first half of semester.
- c) Final paper (40%). Students will write a 20-page double-spaced paper exploring the social challenges associated with religious life in contemporary China. **The topic will be set with the instructor before the mid-term. Outlines including sources will be due two weeks after that.**

### 4. Academic Honesty Statement

Please click the following link to see The Beijing Center's policy on Academic Integrity: <http://thebeijingcenter.org/academic-integrity>

## Course Schedule

(Please note: visits to locations are tentative, given the challenges of logistics and other arrangements. Students are expected to leave their own plans open to accommodate meetings and visits that take place outside of class time.)

### Jan 16

First class--Housekeeping, intros and coordinating our schedules to set up visits to places of worship on non-class days.

Introductory talk: "The Twentieth Century Disaster." "The Chinese calendar."

(Extra credit: what day is today on the Chinese calendar and why does it matter?)

### Jan 23

Second class--What is Chinese religion? What is special about religious life in China? What are commonalities in all traditional religions? Why was this a problem for Chinese modernizers in the 20th century?

Readings due: *The Religious Question in Modern China* Intro, 1-3. *Souls* 1-3.

→Please note, we'll have our first quiz at the start of this class. The quizzes are reading checks just to be sure we've done the reading. Otherwise, based on my experience, the class discussion tends to be wanting.

### Jan 30/Feb 6. Students in Yunnan

### Feb 13

Third class--Formal structures: official policy. How does the state organize religions in China? What is the government's interest in regulating religion?

Readings due: State Council Document 19 on reviving religious institutions; 2004 "Regulations on Religious Organizations." "Red Black and Grey Markets of Religion." *Religious Question* 4, 5. *Souls*, 9.

Optional: "Belief in Control."

### **Feb 20**

Fourth class--Formal structures: government's growing role. How has the government changed its policies in the past decades? Why? How does the government see religion as a support to its ideology?

Readings: *Religious Question* 6, 7. *Souls* 5, 15, 20, 27.

### **March 6**

Fifth class--How are churches organized in China? What are the main organizations?

Readings due: *The Missionary's Curse*; 1-4. *Souls* 4, 11, 13.

Optional: "Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State."

Various newspaper articles on contemporary church situation.

### **March 13**

Sixth class--MID-TERMS.

Topic for final paper due by start of class.

### **March 20**

SPRING BREAK

### **March 27**

Seventh class--visit church.

Readings due: *Missionary's Curse* 5-7, *Souls* 21, 26, 28.

Optional: "Chinese Protestant Christianity Today."

### **April 3**

Eighth class--Islam

*Religious Question*, chapter 13.

Various media articles on Islam to be distributed in class.

### **April 10**

Ninth class--Informal structures: Personal gurus and cultivation.

*Souls* 7, 8, 14, 18.

Optional reading: Bill Porter, *South of the Clouds*. Ian Johnson, *Wild Grass*, chapter 3 "Turning the Wheel."

### **April 17**

Tenth class--informal structures: Folk religion.

What is folk religion and how does the government regulate it? Example of Miaofengshan pilgrimage, which we'll visit on May 4/5

Readings due: *Religious Question* 10., *Souls* 6, 12, 16, 19, 24, 30.

Optional: "The Politics of Legitimation and the Revival of Popular Religion in Shaanbei." "Popular Religion in Contemporary Chinese."

### **April 24**

Eleventh class--visit a Beijing pilgrimage association.

**May 1**

May Day holiday. No class

**May 4/5**

Twelfth Class: On May 4, Saturday, at 3 pm bus from TBC to Miaofengshan. See pilgrimage associations gather, ceremonies, dinner. Overnight on mountain. Sunday morning temple fair. Back to Beijing Sunday afternoon by 3 pm.

→ This trip is the culmination of what we'll have learned this semester. Please note that it's not optional, so if you're planning a trip to Seoul or Singapore or Xishuanbanna this weekend, don't sign up for this class!

**May 8**

Thirteenth class: Final papers due. Final discussions. *Souls*: Afterword.