



# The Beijing Center

北京中国学中心

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## TBC 2500 Religions in China

*Please Note: This is a sample syllabus, and the course schedule is subject to change. Students will receive the updated syllabus prior to the start of first class.*

### **Course Description:**

This university-level course is designed to introduce students to the dazzling creativity and spiritual aspirations of religion and culture in China. This course engages with different perspectives in understanding the significant role of Chinese religion in both traditional and modern China by prioritizing intellectual dialogue and mutual understanding between China and the West.

The first block of this course concentrates on primary readings from China's religious and spiritual heritage by focusing on the foundational texts of its three main traditions: the *Daodejing* of Daoism, the *Analects* of Confucianism, and the *Lotus Sutra* of Buddhism, supplemented by a selection of additional texts that further speaks to each tradition. Class lectures and discussions are focused on these texts and the ideas that fill them, as well as on their impact on later Chinese religion and culture.

The second block of this course begins with an exploration of Neo-Confucianism and its subtle fusion of the three traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. The course then examines the cultural dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism (and Chinese religion more generally) through the writings of the Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci.

The final part of this course looks at the position of religion in the context of the modern Chinese state before ending on a series of studies of contemporary manifestations of Chinese religions in today's world.

### **Course Outcomes:**

- To identify, distinguish, assess, and compare the foundational texts of Chinese religions.
- To analyze the main themes, approaches, and sources on Chinese religious and cultural history.
- To be familiar with the practices and aspirations of Chinese religions.
- To demonstrate knowledge of Chinese religions in both the traditional and modern worlds.
- To recognize and evaluate China's cultural and religious creativity as well as the changes affected by modernity and globalization on traditional ideas of Chinese religions.

## Attendance Policy:

For general rules, please refer to TBC regulations. Specifically for this course:

1. Unexcused absences are not allowed, including for any specially organized field trips.
2. Excused absences due to medical or family emergencies require documentation. Consistent late attendance will result in grade reduction.

## Academic Honesty:

A detailed policy on our Academic Integrity can be found here:

<https://thebeijingcenter.org/academics/academic-integrity/>

## Course Requirements and Form of Assessment:

- a. Class attendance, participation, and presentations (20%).
- b. Mid-term essay (40%).  
Final essay (40%).

## Mid-term and Final essay:

These essays will ask you to respond directly to questions about the major issues presented in the assigned readings that will have been discussed in class. Longer than a “short answer” but shorter than a “term paper,” your essays will ask you to articulate and explain your own understandings of these major issues, roughly equating to one essay of approximately three pages for each set of related texts. Reliance on the required readings will not supply you with the necessary information you will need to respond to the questions successfully, so students are strongly encouraged to take coherent, organized notes from the class discussions. Assigned during the mid-term and final periods, these are take-home essays that will be due several days after they are assigned. Essays that are turned in late will receive a correspondingly lower grade for each consecutive day until I have them in hand.

## Grading Criteria for the Essays

**F (0-60):** None of the following **8 criteria** are sufficiently fulfilled.

**D (61-71):** Some of the following 8 criteria are fulfilled though insufficiently.

**C (72-81):** Adequately fulfills the following 4 criteria:

- 1) **Accuracy:** you have shown that you have correctly learned a minimum of information presented in the readings and class discussions.
- 2) **Comprehension:** you have shown a basic understanding of the meaning and intention of that information and can explain it in your own words.
- 3) **Completeness:** you can recognize which aspects of an issue or which questions concerning a topic must be considered for adequate treatment.
- 4) **Evidence:** your arguments are adequately supported by data, examples, etc. drawn from the readings and class discussions, and you cite your sources accurately and properly.

**B (82-91):** Adequately fulfills criteria 1-4 plus the following two:

- 5) **Analysis:** you are able to analyze material well by breaking it down into its constituent parts and explain the relationships between these parts.

6) **Application:** you are able to make use of acquired knowledge in new contexts, for example, by applying theoretical categories or models to concrete examples, or by deriving theoretical issues from such examples.

A (92-100): Adequately fulfills criteria 1-6 in an exemplary way plus the following two:

7) **Evaluation:** you can judge generalizations and theoretical ideas concerning their strong points and weaknesses. This refers to theoretical material and not to the adequacy of other people's religious orientations.

8) **Creative synthesis:** you are able to pull ideas together in valid conclusions of your own.

**Class Readings will be made available in class.**

## **Class Schedule and Weekly Materials:**

**Week 1: Introduction**

### **Block One: Classical China**

**Week 2: Daoism**

*Daodejing* 道德经 (translated by Thomas Michael)

**Week 3: Confucianism**

*Great Learning* 大学 (on-line translation by Robert Eno) and *Analects of Confucius* 論語 (translated by Simon Leys, Norton Press, 1997)

**Week 4: Daoism and local religions**

Selections from *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (translated by Robert Campany in *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, University of California Press, 2002)

**Week 5: Buddhism:** "Scripture in 42 Sections" 四十二章經 (translated by Robert Sharf in *Religions of China in Practice*, Princeton University Press, 1996)

**Week 6: Buddhism:** Selections from *Lotus Sutra* 妙法蓮華經 (translated by Gene Reeves, Wisdom Publications, 2008)

**Week 7: Midterm**

### **Block Two: Modern China**

**Week 8: Neo-Confucianism**

Selections from Zhu Xi (translated by Daniel Gardner in *Zhu Xi: Basic Teachings*, Columbia University Press, 2022)

**Week 9: Christianity**

Selections from Matteo Ricci, *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* 天主實義天 (translated by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, Institute of Jesuit Resources, 2016)

### **Week 10: Christianity**

Selections from Matteo Ricci, *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* 天主實義天.

### **Week 11: Religion and the State**

1. "Regulation on Religious Affairs" (宗教事务条例 *Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli*)  
<http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=26379&lib=law>
2. "The Catholic Church in Contemporary China: How Does the New Regulation on Religious Affairs Influence the Catholic Church?" by Magdaléna Masláková and Anežka Satorová. *Religions* 10 (2019): 2-17.

### **Week 12: Religion in Contemporary China**

1. "Overt and Covert Buddhism: The Two Faces of University-Based Buddhism in Beijing," by Joseph Chadwin. *Religions* 11 (2020): 1-18.
2. "Religion-Related Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Practices and Initiatives of the Contemporary Chinese State," by Yawen Xu and Yu Tao. *Religions* 13 (2022): 1-22.
3. "Xiuzhen (Immortality Cultivation) Fantasy: Science, Religion, and the Novels of Magic/Superstition in Contemporary China," by Zhang Ni. *Religions* 22 (2020): 1-24.

### **Week 13: Final**