

The College of the Humanities: Religion Program
Religions of China (RELI 2840B)

Instructor: Christopher Jensen
Office: 2A54 Paterson Hall
Office Hours: Tuesday 12:55-13:55

Email:¹ christopher.jensen@carleton.ca
Class Schedule: TH 11:35-12:55
Classroom: B146 Loeb Building

Course Overview

The study of Chinese religions is more relevant now than ever, given the extent to which terms and concepts like karma, the material energy of *qi*, and the polarities of *yin* and *yang*, as well as practices like *tai-chi*, acupuncture and *feng shui*, have become culturally mainstream. This course provides the vocabulary, background knowledge and analytical skills necessary to evaluate the extent to which “pop cultural” versions of these concepts differ from their antecedents. More broadly, it is impossible to understand Chinese philosophy (or culture more broadly) without developing a familiarity with the history, texts and concepts of its primary religious traditions.

More broadly, the study of Chinese religions serves as a fantastic lesson in the interplay between cultural continuity and cultural change. On the one hand, current archaeological evidence suggests that some aspects of Chinese religious life that continue to be practiced today – such as ancestor veneration and certain forms of divination – may be well over three thousand years old. Likewise, many aspects of local deity cults, such as spirit writing and mediumship, seem to have been passed down in a relatively unchanged state for millennia. On the socio-historical front, even when the Chinese imperial house was replaced by invading Turkic, Tibetan, Mongolian, or Manchurian dynasties, which happened at various points between the fall of the Han (ca. 220 CE) and the present, the combined influence of the (“Confucian”) civil service and the perceived power of Chinese religious practices (such as imperial rites, Buddhist spells, Taoist talismans, and shamanic rituals) meant that these “foreign” rulers soon adopted some or all of the Chinese religious system as their own, helping to ensure the survival of these various traditions through official patronage.

This same temporal window reveals tremendous, and often tumultuous, transformation as well. First, the religious landscape of China was immeasurably altered by the arrival of Buddhist texts and icons from India and Central Asia, as their bearers brought with them myths, religious concepts (e.g., karma), and ritual forms that were utterly unlike anything before seen in East Asia. Conversely, the various forms of Buddhism that eventually developed on Chinese soil were profoundly shaped by the religious needs and cultural presuppositions of Chinese Buddhists. Daoist groups, indigenous traditions based on various divine revelations, also contended with the Buddhists, finding themselves in competition for followers and patronage. Over the course of these interactions, however, they drew inspiration from each other as well, leading certain types of religious iconography, as well as practices, deities, and storytelling traditions to be shared between them. The literati (“Confucians”), whose scholarship and religious practice focused in

¹ As per Carleton University policy, all communication between students and professors should be conducted via our Carleton email accounts.

part on texts ascribed to Confucius and his followers, were also drawn into this fray, with some arguing for the compatibility of Buddhism and Chinese values, and others rejecting this premise out of hand.

In this class, we will outline the historical development of China's indigenous religious traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, and "popular" religion), as well as the ways that Buddhism transformed (and was transformed by) the Chinese context. We will also consider the fate of religion under Maoism in the twentieth century and the current state of religion in China.

Course Objectives

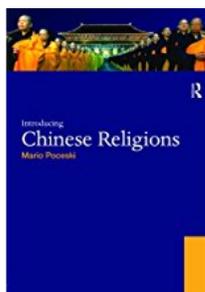
By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify key religious terms, such as *Dao* 道 ("the Way"), *fa* 法 ("Law / Dharma"), *li* 禮 ("ritual propriety"), and the ways that they have been redefined throughout history;
- Chart out the historical development of each of the Chinese religious traditions under discussion;
- Recognize key figures and their contributions;
- Consider the ways that these traditions have influenced one another over time;
- Discuss the central role of ritual in Chinese religions and describe some specific ritual practices in detail;
- Take part in a syllabus design exercise and help to select the final topics we will discuss in this course.

In addition, the course's assessments and assignments will help students to:

- Summarize and evaluate academic arguments;
- Develop a familiarity with selected Chinese primary sources (in translation);
- Engage in thoughtful academic discussions;
- Refine their skills at writing short reflective essays.

Textbook



The required textbook is *Introducing Chinese Religions*, by Mario Poceski (Routledge, 2009). It is available at the Carleton Bookstore. It is also available in a more affordable eBook format (around \$25 USD) at <http://worldreligionsebooks.com/eBooks/chineseReligions/>.

This textbook has been selected because it is widely considered to offer one of the most comprehensive and accessible approaches to this complex topic.²

All additional readings will be posted on cuLearn / ARES.

² See, for instance, Kin Cheung, Adam Valerio, Vishma Kunu and Marcus Bingenheimer, "Chinese Religion(s): A Survey of Textbooks," *Studies in Chinese Religion* 2:3 (2016), 315-328.

Office Hours Policy

I have scheduled this course's office hours immediately after our Tuesday class session. You are welcome to ask me questions after class, during the walk back from our classroom to my office, or in my office thereafter. If I need to cancel my office hours for a given week, I will notify the class via cuLearn. If the scheduled time-slot does not fit your schedule, feel free to email me to schedule an alternate meeting time.

Assessments

Participation – Reading Quizzes (15%)

Reflective Essays (2 x 20% = 40%)

Midterm Exam (15%)

Final Exam (30%)

Participation – Weekly Reading Quizzes (15%)

Your participation in each given week will be assessed via pop quizzes, which will be written during class on Tuesday or Thursday (or both). These quizzes will gauge your engagement with and comprehension of assigned readings, and will also help you to better prepare for the midterm / final exams. Given that one of the goals of this assignment is to encourage students to both read ahead and attend classes, there will be **NO MAKE-UP QUIZZES**.

Reflective Essays (20% x 2) – Oct. 4th and Nov. 15th

Your essays, each of which should be approximately 1000 words / 4 pages in length, will demonstrate your understanding of concepts from course readings and lectures, which you will be using to respond to an analytical / reflective question of your choice. When writing your assignments, you need not refer to any sources aside from the textbook and those mentioned in the essay questions themselves. That said, you must remember to cite these sources when you employ them. Given the brevity of these papers, try to avoid quoting more than a line or two at a time. Judicious selection of appropriate quotations is a useful skill in and of itself!

Your essays will be evaluated according to the following three criteria: 1) comprehension of key concepts; 2) ability to apply these concepts to specific analytical questions; and, 3) structure and mechanics (i.e., citations, paragraph organization, sentence structure, grammar, punctuation).

Essay questions and grading rubrics will be posted to cuLearn by Sept. 20th / Nov. 1st.

For your essays to be graded, you must first write the Indiana University Plagiarism Test (accessible at <https://www.indiana.edu/~plag/test.html>) and upload your certificate of completion to cuLearn.

Midterm Examination (15%) – Nov. 1st

The purpose of the midterm exam is to assess your comprehension, recall and mastery of key terminology and concepts. The exam will be divided into four sections: multiple choice, passage identification, short answer, and a single comparative essay. The “Learning Objectives,” which I post at the beginning of each lecture, will provide direction when reviewing for the exam.

Final Exam (30%) – Date TBA

The cumulative final exam will generally follow the same format as the midterm exam, save that it will also include an additional essay question requiring large-scale synthesis of important course concepts. The text of this question will be provided at the end of our final class session (Dec. 6th).

Tentative Course Timetable

As a general rule, Tuesday’s classes will focus on providing historical background and context, with readings drawn from (and activities based on) relevant sections of the course textbook. Thursday’s classes will involve applying content from Tuesday’s lecture through the close reading and discussion of primary texts in translation.

| Week | Topics | Readings and Assessments |
|--|--|--|
| 1 – Sept. 6 th | Introduction and Course Policies | None |
| 2 – Sept. 11 th 2 – Sept. 13 th | Shang and Zhou Dynasty Religion | (TU): Poceski, Chapter 1 (TH) “Oracle-Bone Inscriptions” from <i>Sources of Chinese Tradition</i> |
| 3 – Sept. 18 th 3 – Sept. 20 th | Chinese Popular Religion | (TU) Poceski, Chapter 7 (TH) “Spellbinding” from <i>Religions of China in Practice</i> |
| 4 – Sept. 25 th 4 – Sept. 27 th | Confucius and the Early Literati Tradition | (TU) Poceski, Chapter 2 (TH) <i>Xunzi</i> [selections] |
| 5 – Oct. 2 nd 5 – Oct. 4 th | The “School of the Dao” and Early Daoism | (TU) Poceski, Chapter 3 (TH) “Commands and Admonitions for the Families of the Great Dao” (Selections) Reflective Essay 1³ |
| 6 – Oct. 9 th 6 – Oct. 11 th | Introduction of Buddhism to China | (TU) Poceski, Chapter 5 (TH) “The Sutra of Forty-two Sections,” in <i>Apocryphal Scriptures</i> , pp. 31-42 |

³ Reminder: you must complete the *Indiana University Plagiarism Test* (and submit your certificate of completion) prior to submitting your first essay.

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|--|---|--|
| 7 – Oct. 16 th | Chinese Buddhism: Belief and Practice | (TU) Poceski, Chapter 6 |
| 7 – Oct. 18 th | | (TH) <i>The Platform Sutra</i> [selections] |
| No Classes Oct. 23 rd and 25 th – Fall Study Break | | |
| 8 – Oct. 30 th | Growth and Development of the Daoist Religion | (TU) Poceski, Chapter 4 |
| 8 – Nov. 1 st | Midterm Exam | (TH) Midterm |
| 9 – Nov. 6 th | Later Developments in the Literati Tradition | (TU) Poceski, Chapter 8 |
| 9 – Nov. 8 th | | (TH) Ebrey – “Ancestral Rites” |
| 10 – Nov. 13 th | Religion in 20 th and 21 st Century China | (TU) Poceski, Chapter 10 |
| 10 – Nov. 15 th | Collaborative Syllabus Design Exercise | (TH) Chau, <i>Miraculous Response</i> [selection] Reflective Essay 2 |
| 11 – Nov. 20 th | Topics TBA | |
| 11 – Nov. 22 nd | | |
| 12 – Nov. 27 th | Topics TBA | |
| 12 – Nov. 29 th | | |
| 13 – Dec. 4 th | Topics TBA | |
| 13 – Dec. 6 th | | |

(Collaboratively Designed) Course Policies

Note: We will discuss these policies in our first class meeting. I will then post a revised version of the syllabus to cuLearn.

- As your instructor, I will respond to emails within _____.
- Given that our class is predicated on discussion and the free exchange of ideas, we must endeavour to create a respectful, critical classroom. We will encourage this sort of discussion by: _____.
- Our policy on using computers / smart devices in class is:
_____.
- Our course's policy on late assignments is:
_____.



University Regulations for All Humanities Courses

Copies of Written Work Submitted

Always retain for yourself a copy of all essays, term papers, written assignments or take-home tests submitted in your courses.

Academic Integrity at Carleton

Plagiarism is presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one's own. Plagiarism includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, and material on the internet. More information can be found [here](#).

Academic Accommodation Policy

Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to the instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the [Student Guide](#)

Religious obligation: write to the instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details see the [Student Guide](#)

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at

613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the [PMC website](#) for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Grading System at Carleton University

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points and the percentage conversion is below. Grade points indicated are for courses with 1.0 credit value. Where the course credit is greater or less than one credit, the grade points are adjusted proportionately.

[Grading System](#)

Course Sharing Websites and Copyright

Classroom teaching and learning activities, including lectures, discussions, presentations, etc., by both instructors and students, are copy protected and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s). All course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, outlines, and other materials, are also protected by copyright and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s).

Students registered in the course may take notes and make copies of course materials for their own educational use only. Students are not permitted to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly for commercial or non-commercial purposes without express written consent from the copyright holder(s).

Statement on Class Conduct

The Carleton University Human Rights Policies and Procedures affirm that all members of the University community share a responsibility to:

- promote equity and fairness,
- respect and value diversity,
- prevent discrimination and harassment, and preserve the freedom of its members to carry out responsibly their scholarly work without threat of interference.

Deferred Term Work

In some situations, students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, which forces them to delay submission of the work.

Students who claim illness, injury or other extraordinary circumstances beyond their control as a reason for missed term work are held responsible for immediately informing the instructor concerned and for making alternate arrangements with the instructor and **in all cases this must occur no later than three (3.0) working days after the term work was due.**

The alternate arrangement must be made before the last day of classes in the term as published in the academic schedule. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of term. More information is available [in the calendar](#).

Deferred Final Exams

Students who are unable to write a final examination because of a serious illness/emergency or other circumstances beyond their control may apply for accommodation. Normally, the accommodation for a missed final examination will be granting the student the opportunity to write a deferred examination. In specific cases when it is not possible to offer a deferred examination, and with the approval of the Dean, an alternate accommodation may be made. [More information](#).

The application for a [deferral](#) must:

1. be made in writing or online to the Registrar's Office no later than **three working days** after the original final examination or the due date of the take-home examination; and,
2. be fully supported by appropriate documentation and, in cases of illness, by a medical certificate dated no later than one working day after the examination, or by appropriate documents in other cases. Medical documents must specify the date of the onset of the illness, the (expected) date of recovery, and the extent to which the student was/is incapacitated during the time of the examination. The University's preferred medical form can be found at the Registrar's Office [forms and fees page](#).

Any questions related to deferring a Final Exam or Final Assignment/Take Home Examination should be directed to the [Registrar's Office](#).

Withdrawal From Courses

Withdrawn. No academic credit, no impact on the CGPA. WDN is a permanent notation that appears on the official transcript for students who withdraw after the full fee adjustment date in each term (noted in the Academic Year section of the Calendar each term). Students may withdraw on or before the last day of classes.

Important dates can be found [here](#):

Financial vs. Academic Withdrawal

Make sure that you are aware of the separate deadlines for Financial and Academic withdrawal!

Making registration decisions in Carleton Central involves making a financial and academic commitment for the courses you choose, regardless of attendance. If you do not attend – you must withdraw in Carleton Central within the published deadlines to cancel your registration. [More information](#)

Department Contact Information

College of the Humanities 300 Paterson Hall (613)520-2809

CollegeOfHumanities@cunet.carleton.ca

Drop box for CLCV, HUMS LATN GREK Term Papers and assignments is outside 300 P.A.

Greek and Roman Studies 300 Paterson Hall (613)520-2809

GreekAndRomanStudies@cunet.carleton.ca

Drop Box is outside of 300 P.A.

Religion 2A39 Paterson Hall (613)520-2100

Religion@cunet.carleton.ca

Drop box for RELI Term Papers and assignments is outside of 2A39 P.A.

Registrar's Office 300 Tory (613)520-3500

<https://carleton.ca/registrar/>

Student Resources on Campus

[CUKnowHow Website](#)

[Academics: From registration to graduation, the tools for your success.](#)