### Course Details

**Title:** Religion and Society in China: Gods, Ghosts, Buddhas and Ancestors  
**Call number:** RELST-UA 9270  
**Points:** 4

### Instructor Contact Information

**Name:** Francesca Tarocco  
**Email:** ft21@nyu.edu  
**Office Hours:** by previous appointment

### Class Time

**Time:** Tuesdays, 1:00-4:00 PM

### Course Description

This course is a survey of the major historical and contemporary currents of China’s religious thought and practice, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and “popular religion”. It will focus on the interactions between such teachings and practices, as well as on the contributions of all four to Chinese culture. You will study topics such as divination, visual culture, ritual, ancestor worship, morality, longevity techniques, healing practices and meditation. A selected number of primary and secondary sources will be discussed in each lecture; documentary films and visits to religious sites will be also key constituents of the course.

### Course Objectives

You will take away from this course a firm understanding of China’s dazzling cultural and religious creativity and of the changes affected by modernity and globalization on traditional ideas of the supernatural and the netherworld. You will also have gained knowledge and understanding of the main themes, approaches and sources on Chinese religious and cultural history.

### Grading Components

| Participation in Class: (Presentations, peer-reviews, responses, quizzes, class discussion): 50%  | 50% |
| Midterm take home exam paper: 25%  | 25% |
| Final Paper: 25%  | 25% |

**Miss more than 3 classes= NO CREDITS**

**ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING**

The reviews and/or in-class presentations should be synopses of research rooted in the experience based on visits and guest lecturers or the readings and should identify key facts, arguments, and issues raised in class. These responses/presentations should allow for discussion among class participants. All written assignments are to be given to the instructor in class. In sum, class work alternates between:

a) In-class group or individual responses/presentations;  
b) Site visit reports and reviews;  
c) Mid-term annotated bibliography paper;  
d) Final Project: an eight pages research paper, fully referenced, on a topic of your choice (to be agreed with Prof. Tarocco)

### Instructor Bio

Francesca Tarocco is a scholar, writer and critic base in Shanghai where she teaches Chinese cultural history at NYU. Francesca was educated at Venice University, Tongji University (Shanghai), Sichuan University and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, where she received her Ph.D. (2004). Between 2005 and 2008, she was the recipient of a Leverhulme Trust Fellowship for her research on the modern Chinese Press. Prof. Tarocco has published several studies in English, Chinese, Japanese and Italian, including *The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhism: Attuning the Dharma* (Routledge, 2007) and “Terminology and Religious Identity: Buddhism and the Genealogy of the Term Zongjiao”, in V. Krech, *Dynamics in The History of Religions*, Brill, 2011).

### Grading Expectations

A: Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning.  
B: Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research.
### C: Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level.

### D: Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations.

### F: Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria.

### Activities
Optional and suggested trips and events will be discussed throughout the semester.

### Attendance Policy
NYU Shanghai has a strict policy about course attendance that allows no unexcused absences. Each unexcused absence will result in the deduction of three percentage points from the final grade. More than two unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.

Students should contact their instructors to catch up on missed work but should not approach them for excused absences. All absence requests and excuses must follow the application procedure directions here: [https://wikis.nyu.edu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=30017155](https://wikis.nyu.edu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=30017155)

Students are expected to arrive to class promptly both at the start of class and after breaks. Arriving more than 10 minutes late or leaving more than 10 minutes early can be considered an unexcused absence. Unexcused absences from exams are not permitted and will result in failure of the exam. If you are granted an excused absence from an exam by NYU Shanghai administration, your instructor will decide how you will make up the exam.

This attendance policy also applies for classes involving a field trip or other off-campus visit. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the agreed meeting point on time.

There will be no adjustment of attendance records after the end of the semester. If you wish to contest a marked absence, you must do so before you leave Shanghai; if you think that there may be a discrepancy about your attendance in class on a given day, ask the NYU Shanghai academic staff to let you look at the attendance record.

### Submission of Late Work
Written work due in class must be submitted during class time.

Late work should be submitted in person to the Academic Assistant during regular office hours (9:30-6:00, Monday-Friday). The Academic Assistant will mark down the date and time of submission in the presence of the student. In the absence of the Academic Assistant, another member of the administrative staff can accept the work in person, following the same protocol.

Work submitted within five weekdays will be penalized one portion of a grade for every day that it is late (so if it is late by one day, an assignment marked an “A” will be changed to an “A-,” and so on). Work submitted more than five days after the due date without an agreed extension will be given a zero.

Please note that final essays must be submitted on time.

### Plagiarism Policy
The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism. Students must retain an electronic copy of their work until final grades are posted on Albert. They must be prepared to supply an electronic copy if requested to do so by NYU Shanghai. Not submitting a copy of their work upon request will result in automatic failure in the assignment and possible failure in the class.

### Required Text(s)

- Also useful:
### Class 1
**28 August**

**Introduction to the Course: What is Chinese Religion?**

Reading: “The Spirits of Chinese Religion” (PDF)

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### Class 2
**4 September**

**Site Visit: Chinese Religion in the Shanghai Museum**

Unlike many museums in China, the Shanghai Museum is arranged by theme rather than by dynasty. The **Bronze Gallery** and the **Stone Sculpture Gallery** on the first floor and the **Painting Gallery** on the third floor are generally considered the most impressive. **TAKE AS MANY NOTES AS YOU CAN – TRY TO FIX IN YOUR MEMORY SOME IDEAS AND HISTORICAL PERIODS. Take Photos!**

- **At home assignment:** Write a report (word limit 1000 words, minimum 850 words) on the visit to the Shanghai Museum. Include as many details as possible: names, dates, function of the objects, etc.

*Your report:*

List your three favorite artifacts. What do you like about them? Describe them in such a way that someone else could find them.

**Bronzes Gallery (Ground Floor)**

1. Read the exhibit introduction. Choose two pieces of information and find two examples in the gallery that serve as illustrations of this.
2. What shapes and designs do you see? Describe the patterns and motifs.
3. What are the artifacts used for?
4. What can you imagine about the society that used them?
5. What are the types of artifacts on display? Give 3 examples.
6. Find some example of how gender is reflected in the objects.

**Sculpture Gallery (Ground Floor)**

7. Read the exhibit introduction. Choose two pieces of information and find two examples in the gallery that serve as illustrations.
8. Look at different representations of the Buddha. Notice the position of the hands, arms, feet and fingers. What do these mean?
9. Which shapes and patterns are repetitive?
10. Remember a story about one of the sculptures
11. Look at the variation of facial expressions. Do they display different personalities?
12. Comment on the religious or ritual significance of the objects.

- Prepare 2 study questions/topics for discussion in class next week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class 3 11 September</th>
<th>Lecture: Patterns of Chinese Religious Life: The Veneration of Ancestors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td><strong>In class discussion:</strong> “Religion in the Shanghai Museum”</td>
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<td><strong>1st Students’ Presentations (no less than 25 minutes per student):</strong> Read the texts “The Spirits of Chinese Religion” or “Communal Worship” and prepare a detailed summary and PPT with at least 15 slides with text and illustrations + 2 study questions.</td>
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<td><em>NOTE THAT ALL PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS ETC. WILL BE PEER ASSESSED IN WRITING IN CLASS:</em></td>
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<td>- How effective was the presentation/slide show/written assessment (1-5); What could be done to improve it (write a few sentences/suggestions)? How effective was the use of Slides/PPTs/writing (1-5)? What could be done to make it more accurate (write a few sentences/suggestions)? What could be done to make it more readable/watchable (write a few sentences/suggestions)? What should have been there and was in fact missing (write a few sentences/suggestions)?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Class 4 18 September</th>
<th>Lecture: Confucius and Confucianism + Analects <a href="http://ctext.org/analects">http://ctext.org/analects</a></th>
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<td><strong>Site Visit: The Shanghai Confucian Temple</strong></td>
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<td>- <em>The Shanghai Wen Miao (<a href="http://ctext.org/analects">上海文廟</a>) is the main temple of Confucius in Shanghai, and is similar to the renowned temples as the original Temple of Confucius in his hometown Qufu, and the grand Confucius Temple in Beijing; although the Shanghai Wen Miao is smaller than those two. The temple is located on Wen Miao Lu (<a href="http://ctext.org/analects">文廟路</a>) in Huangpu District, and just outside the temple is the &quot;Wen Miao Market&quot;. The market opens every Sunday morning to host a temple fair.</em></td>
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<td>- <strong>AT HOME Assignment:</strong> Write a report on the visit to Confucian temple. Include as many facts as possible: names, dates, function of the halls, objects, etc. Verify your information before writing it down.</td>
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<td><strong>Peer assessments of previous written assignments (Confucian temple and Shanghai Museum).</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Viewing of the Documentary “The Ghost Festival”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>IT IS NOW TIME TO TALK TO YOUR PROFESSOR: GET FEEDBACK AND DISCUSS MID-TERM PAPER</strong></td>
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<td>Class 6 9 October</td>
<td>Midterm Paper due (no class)</td>
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<td>CHOOSE TWO QUESTIONS FROM THE LIST BELOW, SUBMIT TO JOYCE GE BEFORE 5 PM</td>
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**Answer TWO questions not on the same topic**

THE MAXIMUM LENGTH of EACH ESSAY IS 1500 WORDS (MINIMUM 1000).

You have to QUOTE ALL REFERENCES IN FULL (authors, title of the book/essay, publishers/journal issue, page numbers).

GENERIC WEB-BASED SOURCES THAT ARE NOT SCHOLARLY/ACADEMIC ARE NOT REGARDED AS LEGITIMATE AND SHOULD NOT BE USED.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Beside the textbook you should also consult and cite AT LEAST ONE of the books listed here. You can also BROWSE digital archives (JSTOR, MUSE) and search for articles on specific topics concerning Chinese Religions, and Chinese Buddhism and Daoism.


Daniel L. Overmyer ed., *Religion in China Today, China Quarterly Special Issues* (no. 3), 2003; (YOU CAN ALSO FIND THIS through Bobst)


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**QUESTIONS:**

1) Compare and contrast the Shang versus Zhou conceptions of the supreme deity, and explain the significance of the differences between the two within the larger context of evolving conceptions of divinity in ancient China.

2) Trace the emergence of ancestor worship in ancient China and explain the rise of filial piety.

3) What was the attitude of Confucius towards the cumulative traditions of the past and how did he...
perceive his life mission in relation to them?

4) What is the role of religion in Chinese political history? Discuss giving specific examples.

5) What was/is the status of women in Daoism and/or Buddhism and how does it compare with the general status of women in traditional Chinese society?

6) What was the scope and significance of the diffusion of Buddhism in China and what were the key factors that contributed to its rise to pre-eminence?

7) Which popular bodhisattva underwent a gender transformation in China and what are the possible explanations for that?

8) What is the role of fate and divination in traditional China and today?

9) What are the main ideas and practices surrounding death in traditional China?

10) Is there one Chinese religion or many? Discuss offering specific examples.

Week 7 16 October


- **Ten-question quiz on Confucian Temple**

- **Peer Assessment of written assignments (Wenmiao and Shanghai Museum)**

- **View of the documentary “Fortune Teller” (算命, 2010) by Xu Tong 徐童**

Class 8 23 October


- **Fieldtrip visit to Buddhist Monastery Longhuasi**, the largest, most authentic and ancient temple complex in the city of Shanghai.

  The temple was first built in 242, during the Three Kingdoms Period. According to a legend, Sun Quan King of the Kingdom of Wu, had obtained some relics. To house these precious relics, the king ordered the construction of 13 pagodas. Longhua Pagoda (Longhua Ta), part of the Longhua temple complex, is said to have been one of them. Like the function of the pagoda, the name of the temple also has its origin in a local legend according to which a dragon once appeared on the site. Whereas the core of the present Longhua Pagoda survives from that period, most buildings in the temple proper were rebuilt during the reigns of the Tongzhi Emperor and the Guangxu Emperor in the Qing Dynasty. A modern restoration of the entire temple complex was carried out in 1954.

- **Assignment: Write a report on the visit to Longhuasi.** Include as many facts as possible: names, dates, function of the objects, etc (see above). *(word limit 1000 words, minimum 850 words)*

Class 9

**Lecture: Daoism + Daodejing** [http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing](http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing)

NYU Shanghai
30 October

- **Site Visit to the Daoist Temple Baiyunguan**

Baiyunguan is the head Daoist temple in Shanghai. Originally built in 1882, it was relocated in 2006. The temple is one of only two Daoist temples in China that once possessed the precious Ming Dynasty Daoist Canon, together with the much larger Baiyunguan in Beijing. The two-story temple is housed in a courtyard building with red walls, lattice windows and doors, and has a beautiful ornamented roof. Incense-bearing practitioners pray before a dizzying array of gilded deities. The priests often perform ritual services.

- **Assignment:** Write a report on the visit to Baiyunguan. Include as many details as possible: names, dates, function of the objects, etc. (word limit 1000 words, minimum 850 words)

Class 10
6 November

Class 10
6 November

Lecture: Chinese Christianity, the beginnings

- **4th Students’ presentation and peer assessment:** “Chinese Protestant Christianity Today”, *The China Quarterly* / Volume 174 / June 2003, pp 488-504
  - DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0009443903000299

  “Newly ordained Bishop of Shanghai held in Sheshan basilica after public resignation from patriotic positions”
  http://shanghaiist.com/2012/07/10/newly ordained_bishop_of_shanghai_h.php

- **View of the documentary Fangshan Church (房山教堂, 2005) by Xu Xin 徐辛**

- **AT HOME ASSIGNMENT:** WRITE UP OF ONE OF THE FILMS WE SAW IN CLASS. Give it to the Professor at the beginning of next class. (word limit 1000 words, minimum 850 words)

Class 11
13 November

Lecture: Religion in Modern China - Christianity

- **Site visit to St. Ignatius Cathedral (聖依納爵主教座堂)**

Today's structure dates from 1910. The Jesuits were initially invited there by a local high-rank Ming Dynasty official, landowner and scientist, Xu Guangqi who was himself converted Catholicism by the Jesuits' most famous missionary to China, Matteo Ricci (1553-1610). Xu is buried in a public park named after him on Nandan Xi Lu, southwest of the cathedral. Today, only church, part of the school, and the recently reopened library remain of the large missionary center that once was.

- **Assignment:** Write a report on the visit to the Cathedral and other places connected with Shanghai Christianity Include as many facts as possible. (word limit 1000 words, minimum 850 words)

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TIME TO TALK TO YOUR PROFESSOR ABOUT YOUR FINAL PAPER

**RESEARCH PAPER:** AT LEAST 1500 WORDS, TEN IMAGES/ILLUSTRATIONS WITH PROPER CAPTIONS, AND FIVE ITEMS IN THE BIBLIOGRAPHY; ARTICLES/BOOKS/ESSAYS/JOURNAL ARTICLES

Class 12

Lecture: Secularization and Nationalist Ideologies

NYU Shanghai
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<th>Date</th>
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| 20 November | - **5th Students’ Presentation and Peer Assessment:** Goossaert and Palmer, pp. 164-198; Nedostup, Ch. 1 and 2.  
- **Quiz in class:** Ten questions on Christianity in China |
|           | **Class 13, 27 November:** Site Visit to the Shanghai Propaganda Posters Museum  
**REMEMBER TO PHOTOGRAPH AND DOCUMENT ONE POSTER FOR THE FINAL SHOW AND TELL**  
http://www.shanghaipropagandaart.com/home.asp  
This collection affords a remarkable look into the twentieth-century history of China. The posters serve as a valuable historical document and provide an idealized account of a key period in global history. In the days before CNN and Fox News, a still image truly was worth a thousand words and these posters were how Mao and his group informed and restored the collective mind of the Chinese people. It is a heroic saga of countless victories over momentous struggle. Still behind the happy faces beamimg out of these posters, one can also guess at the true-life anxieties and hardships of the people these posters purported to represent. Indeed, each poster is both a work of art and an insight into the events of those times.  
The Chinese propaganda posters are rich in contents and styles. The early posters had a surreal cartoonist style to them reminiscent of European early forays into the new medium of large-scale industrial print propaganda. As the Korean war drew to a close, you can see the entrance of more Socialist-realism influences with the idealized and heroic worker in their utopian communities. An interesting side note was the influence of the 1930s Shanghai calendar girl posters on some of these 1950s posters. Big Leap Forward and Cold War posters of later 1950s and early 1960s saw quite a few interesting creation of folk art painting. The change to the red-art style of the cultural revolution and the violent and militaristic themes is a sudden shift that gives the readers some impression of the mood of the time. Those red and black woodcut style posters made by the art school student rebellion groups are powerful.  
- **Assignment:** Write a report on the visit to The Propaganda Poster Museum Include as many details as possible: names, dates, function of the objects, etc. |
| 4 December           | **Class 14, 14 December:** Lecture: Post-Mao Religious Revival, Transnational Religious Movements and the Media  
- Show and Tell: Choose a Propaganda poster and describe its content, style, message and so on.  
- Peer Assessment: Christian Shanghai reports. |
| 11 December          | **Class 15, 11 December:** No class - Final Research Paper is Due |

NYU Shanghai