HIST 2865: Gender and Power in China

Course Description:
This course explores the power dynamics of gender relations in Chinese history and contemporary society. It is a lecture course with a built-in discussion component in class. Whenever possible, I select readings from Chinese sources. I deliberately juxtapose topics from pre-modern history with their modern counterparts to highlight the co-existence of temporalities that affect the choices women make. In the lecture I cover the necessary historical and theoretical background; in discussion sessions we work together to analyze the primary sources or research articles and apply them to our present world.

Learning Objectives:
This course will familiarize students with theoretical discussions of power and agency in recent feminist discourses as well as specific information on the situation of women in China in various historical settings. The latter includes knowledge of the gender ideology of the two main classical traditions—Confucianism and Daoism—and a major religion, Buddhism, the operations of such socio-political institutions as family and law, life course and career choices of women, as well as the impact of modernization and revolution.

Students who complete this course will learn how to:
1. Read texts critically and apply them to contemporary situations
2. Understand the cultural logic of a time and place not our own
3. Engage in informed discussions and debates with people from different backgrounds and with different opinions
4. Write with clarity and persuasive power

Requirements and Evaluation:
There are no prerequisites for the course. Knowledge of Chinese history and society is helpful but not mandatory. If without the necessary background, you may want to purchase one of the following standard textbooks on Chinese history and do optional reading on your own from week to week:
3. Conrad Schirokauer and Miranda Brown, A Brief History of Chinese Civilization (eBook)

You are expected to come to class prepared, having done the readings assigned for the day and completed the short assignments designed to guide your reading, if any.

Your final grade will be based on:
Class participation 30%
Summary papers (about 2 pp. each) 40% (due Feb. 9, Feb. 23, Mar. 10, Apr. 12)
Final paper (about 10 pp.) 30% (due May 12)

“Class participation” may include: Occasional coursework postings, small exercises, short presentations, leading discussions, and regular attendance. The exercises and assignments will be announced in class and on Courseworks.

The materials of this class are divided into five sections, following a rough chronological order. You will write one short take-home “summary paper” (each about 2 pages long and counts toward 10% of your total grade) at the end of each section except for the last, making a total of four summary papers scattered throughout the semester. They are meant to help you digest the readings and synthesize them with the lectures and class discussions.

The final is a take-home paper (about 10 pp.) due on the day of the scheduled final exam (Thur. May 12, 4 p.m.) It builds on the four summary papers and gives you a chance to review class materials, deepen your analyses in the summary papers, and strengthen your interpretations of the issues discussed. It is NOT a research paper and requires no additional outside reading.

You MUST complete all written assignments to receive a grade for the course.

Readings:
The following books, assigned in their entirety, are available for purchase at Book Culture (536 W.112th St.):
2. Yan Yunxiang, *Private Life Under Socialism* (Stanford UP, 2003) [also as eBook]  
Other assigned articles can be downloaded from CLIO or Courseworks.

Extra Credit Opportunities:
For extra credit, you may visit a museum exhibition or attend a talk on or off campus, and write a one-page report discussing how it relates to some of our course themes. You can submit the report any time during the semester up to the day of the final exam, May 12.

Some possibilities are:


Course Outline:
I. Introduction: Key Concepts and Themes

WEEK 1
Jan. 19  Introduction

Jan. 21  [#1] Western and Chinese Concepts of Gender and Sex
Reading:  Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History*, xv-xx, 1-79

WEEK 2
Jan. 26  [#2] Modern and Pre-Modern Bodies
Reading:  Mann, *Gender and Sexuality*, 83-134

Jan. 28  [#3] The Patriarchal Family
Reading:  Mann, *Gender and Sexuality*, 137-168

WEEK 3
Feb. 2   [#4] The Women’s Perspective of the Patriarchal Family
Reading:  Mann, *Gender and Sexuality*, 169-200

Feb. 4   [#5] Summary I: Body, Self, and Family: Chinese and Western Comparisons
Reading:  Amy Chua, “Why Chinese Moms Are Superior”

II. The Early Empire: Classical Foundations (2nd Century BCE-5th Century CE)

WEEK 4
Feb. 9   [#6] Gender Norms in the Confucian Tradition: The Male-Female Binary
Reading:  Ban Zhao, *Admonitions for Daughters*
** Summary paper I due **

Feb. 11  [#7] Gender in the Buddhist Tradition: Beyond the Male-Female Binary
Reading:  1. "The Lotus Sutra,"186-189

WEEK 5
Feb. 16  [#8] Training the Daoist Body: Self-Cultivation Exercises

Feb. 18  [#9] Summary II: Body, Gender, Sex: Pre-Modern and Modern Comparisons

III. Transition to Modernity (1890s-1949)
WEEK 6
Feb. 23  [#10] China Under Western Eyes: From Footbinding to Anti-Footbinding
Reading: Qiu Jin, “Excerpts from Stones of the Jingwei Bird,” in Writing Women in Modern China, comp. Amy Dooling and Kristina Torgeson, 39-78
Review: Mann, Gender and Sexuality, 103-120
** Summary paper II due **
Feb. 25  [#11] The Women’s Question: Concept of Women’s Rights
Reading: He-Yin Zhen, “On Women’s Liberation,” in Birth of Chinese Feminism

WEEK 7
Mar. 1  [#12] Masculinity Besieged
Reading: Susan Glosser, “’The Truths I have Learned’: Nationalism, Family Reform, and Male Identity in China’s New Culture Movement, 1915-1923,” Chinese Femininities Chinese Masculinities, 120-144
Review: Mann, Gender and Sexuality, 83-102
Mar. 3  [#13] Family Revolution and National Revolution
Reading: 1. Mao Zedong, "Commentary on Miss Zhao's Suicide," and "The Question of Miss Zhao's Personality," in Mao's Road to Power, ed. Stuart Schram, 421-422
2. Lu Xun, "After Nora Walks Out, What Then?" [Often rendered "What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?"]], 1-6
Review: Mann, Gender and Sexuality, 27-49

WEEK 8
Mar. 8  [#14] Summary III: The May Fourth New Culture Movement
Mar. 10  Breathing Space
** Summary paper III due **
(May 12-20  SPRING BREAK!)

IV. The Socialist/Maoist Revolution (1949-1980s)

WEEK 9
Mar. 22  [#15] Maoist Gender Policy
Mar. 24  [#16] Rural Transformations: Collectivization
Reading: Yan Yunxiang, Private Life Under Socialism, 1-41
WEEK 10
Reading:  Yan, Private Life, 42-85
Mar. 31  Film: “Small Happiness”
Reading:  Yan, Private Life, 86-111

WEEK 11
Apr. 5  [#18] The Cultural Revolution (and Summary IV)
2. Yan, Private Life, 112-161

V. The Reform Years (1980s-2014)

Apr. 7  [#19] Market Reforms: Internal Migration; Consumption
Reading:  Yan, Private Life, 162-189

WEEK 12
Apr. 12  [#20] The One-Child Policy
** Summary paper IV due **

Apr. 14  [#21] Sex as Identity; Sex as Work
Reading:  Yan, Private Life, 190-227

WEEK 13
Apr. 19  [#22] Ethnic Minorities: Development and New Inequalities
Reading:  Louisa Schein, “Gender and Internal Orientalism,” Chinese Femininities Chinese Masculinities, 385-411
Review:  Mann, Gender and Sexuality, 169-185

Apr. 21  [#23] Between the State and the Market: A Women’s Public Sphere?
Reading:  Mayfair Yang, “From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women's Public Sphere in China,” in Spaces of Their Own: Women’s Public Spheres in Transnational China, ed. Mayfair Yang
Review:  Mann, Gender and Sexuality, 137-153

WEEK 14
Apr. 26  Discussion: The Future of State Feminism? Women’s Public Sphere?
2. Li Xiaojiang, “With What Discourse Do We Reflect on Chinese Women? Thoughts on Transnational Feminism in China,” in *Spaces of Their Own*, 261-277

Apr. 28 Summary V: From Collectivization to Individualism?

**May 12 (Thur.) Final paper due at 4 p.m.**