

ASIA 2609W: Writing and Gender in Traditional China

TTh 11:00–12:15 Buttrick 304

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Office Hours: T 1:15–3:15 Buttrick 260



Course Description:

This course introduces major gender issues in pre-modern China (ca. 1st century CE–20th century CE) through reading literary and historical texts. In turn, we will discuss conditions for gendered writing, writings by women in traditional China, and writings on gender relations mostly by male authors. Readings cover most genres of Chinese literature from poetry and prose to drama and fiction, supplemented by visual materials.

Through reading these texts, you will not only learn about women's life, roles, and thoughts in traditional China, but also think critically about such issues as gender inequality, body and cross-dressing, gender and religion, and above all, writing as media for gender expression and representation. This course will also help you understand gender issues in today's world, both in China and elsewhere.

Writing assignments include weekly online-posting and 3 papers (including a research paper). We will discuss and practice specific skills for critical writing. I have designed a series of activities to help you hone the tools for writing.

Whereas there is no prerequisite for this course, it is suggested that you have at least some experience of writing course papers before taking this course. Please consult me if you are not sure whether this course fits you. All readings are in English. Class is taught in English.

Texts:

- 1) Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, eds., *The Red Brush* (Harvard University Press, 2004). (ISBN: 9780674013933; available at university bookstore)
- 2) Other readings will be provided on Brightspace. If you cannot find it there, find it on your own.

Important References and Research Tools:

Jstor (<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu>)
Bibliography of Asian Studies (<http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/eres?id=351>)
Google Scholar (<http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/eres?id=83>)
Patricia Ebrey. *Women and the Family in Chinese History*. Routledge, 2003.
The “Suggested Readings” at the end of the textbook

Course Requirements:

Writing Requirements

- 1) Short Papers: Written requirements include two short papers and a final project. The first paper (2-3 pages) is one of close reading on an assigned topic. The second paper (4-5 pages) requires both close reading of some primary text(s) and reference to secondary studies.

Final Project: We will together discuss and produce a class magazine. You need to contribute a substantive piece—a research paper, a book review, an interview, a photo essay, or a piece of creative writing.

Revolving around these three papers, we will have a series of writing exercises and workshops. I encourage you to visit the Writing Studio and consult our librarian Yuh-fen Benda (yuh-fen.benda@Vanderbilt.Edu) during the semester to discuss issues about your writings.

Late papers are NOT accepted. If you need an extension, please contact me in advance. Extensions are given with higher expectations.

- 2) Online Posting: Please submit a post about the readings in the discussion section on Brightspace at least once a week for a least 10 weeks. Your posts should be one of three types: a question about some problem in the primary reading (specify page numbers) and a tentative answer; a clarification question about difficult or confusing parts of the primary texts (explain why it’s difficult); response to other

students' posts.

Other Requirements

- 1) Class Participation; All weekly readings are due before class. We will frequently refer to the texts in class, especially during the discussion, so you should bring the readings to class, in electronic or printed forms. Active participation in class discussion is very important. Please come to class with questions and opinions about the readings.
- 2) You will work in groups to do presentations and lead a discussion session.
- 3) Absent Policy: Please contact me and provide verifiable excuses for unavoidable absence.
- 4) Computer Policy: Electronic devices (computers and phones) are allowed in class ONLY for reading and note taking. Non-class-related activities such as texting and web-surfing are prohibited.

NB: Instead of the essay and papers, graduate and professional school students will write a 4-5-page paper proposal and a 20-25-page research paper. There will also be additional secondary readings based on your specific interests. All the other requirements and grading scheme apply to graduate students.

Grading:

In-class participation: 15%	A	94-100
Presentation and lead discussion: 15%	A-	90-93
Online Posting: 15%	B+	87-89
First Paper: 10%	B	84-86
Second paper: 15%	B-	80-83
Final Project: 30%	C+	77-79
	C	74-76
	C-	70-73
	D	60-69
	F	0-60

Honor Code: The Vanderbilt Honor Code governs all work done in this class. For more information, visit <http://www.owen.vanderbilt.edu/about-us/honor-code.cfm>

Schedule and Readings (readings with * are optional; they can be references for your papers)

1/8 Introduction: writing and gender in Chinese history

Part I Conditions for Gender and Gendered Writing

1/10 *Yinyang and Nannü* —gender in philosophy

PDF Patricia Ebrey, "Women in Traditional China"
Rosenlee, Li-Hsiang Lisa. *Confucianism and Women*, Ch 3. (PDF Rosenlee, Yinyang)
Full book available at
<http://site.ebrary.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/lib/vanderbilt/reader.action?ppg=56&docID=10579285&tm=1483509861954>

* Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender (for general reference, not for quote in papers) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/>

1/15 Screening: Yue-Qing Yang, *Nu-shu: a hidden language of women in China* (1999)

1/17 Script for women

"In a Script of Their Own", In *Red Brush*, 543-566 (focus on 543-46, 555-66)
Mann, Life Course of Women (PDF)

* "Introduction" in *Red Brush*, pp. 1-9.

* Wilt L. Idema, "Introduction," in *Heroines of Jiangyong: Chinese Ballads in Women's Script*.

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/lib/vand/reader.action?ppg=1&docID=3444406&tm=1546276164318>

Part II Writing Women in Family and Society

Court Ladies

1/22 The Scholar Ban Zhao

"Ban Zhao", "Thoughts upon Reading the 'Biography of Ban Zhao,'" in *Red Brush*, 17-42, 657-658.

* Lee, Lin-Lee. "Inventing familial agency from powerlessness: Ban Zhao's lessons for women." *Western Journal of Communication* 73.1 (2009): 47-66.

Writing Activity: exercise on close reading

Assign first paper topic

1/24 Empress Wu Zetian and Her Ghost Writer

Shangguan Wan'er, in *Red Brush*, 61-72

PDF Selected poems by Wu Zetian and Shangguan Wan'er

* Ebrey, "Rethinking the Imperial Harem", Ch. 8 of *Women and the Family in Chinese History*

* Jay, Jennifer W. "Imagining Matriarchy: Kingdoms of Women" in Tang China." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1996): 220-229.

Communities of Letters

1/29 Widow poets

“The Eloping Widow”, “Gu Ruopu,” “A Loyalist Widow”, in *Red Brush*, 108-112, 414-421; 426-431;

* Susan Mann, “Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China,” in *The Journal of Asian Studies*

* Kang-i Sun Chang, “The Literary Voice of Widow Poets in the Ming and Qing,” in *Ming Qing Studies* 2012.

1/31 Women as family teachers

“Wang Duan” in *Red Brush*, 620-629;

PDF Huang Yuanjie and Wang Duanshu

* Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (1994), Chapter 3.

First paper due at midnight

2/5 The Banana Garden Poetry Club

“Chai Jingyi”, “Zhu Rouze”, “Lin Yining”, “Qian Fenglun”, etc., in *Red Brush*, 471-495;

* Robertson, Maureen. "Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Medieval and Late Imperial China." *Late Imperial China* 13.1 (1992): 63-110.

2/7 Writing Session

Visit from the Writing Studio at Vanderbilt

The nuts and bolts of a research paper

Introducing the second assignment

Buddhist Nuns

2/12 Poems of Buddhist nuns

“Buddhist Nuns,” in *Red Brush*, 153-163

* Selection from Kathryn Ann Tsai, ed. *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries: a Translation of the Pi-ch'iu-ni Chuan*. University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

2/14 Poems of Buddhist nuns (after 1600)

“Buddhist Nuns,” in *Red Brush*, 319-29

* *Daughters of Emptiness: Poems of Chinese Buddhist Nuns*, translated and annotated by Grant.

Writing Activity: discuss your second paper proposal: topic, question, primary and secondary sources

Courtesans

2/19 Courtesan in Tang capital

PDF The Tale of Li Wa

* Dudbridge, Glen, and Hsing-chien Pai. *The tale of Li Wa: Study and critical*

edition of a Chinese story from the ninth century. Ithaca Press, 1983.

2/21 Liu Rushi as Courtesan, Writer, Lover, Wife, and Hero

“Liu Shih”, in *Red Brush*, 374-382.

* “Twenty Songs by Liu Shih”, in Kang-I Sun Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet Ch’en Tzu-Lung*.

* Waiyee Li, “The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal”, in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*

2/26 Writing Session:

Discuss your second paper draft

2/28 Did the past matter?—Women in modern Chinese history

In-class screening, no reading

Second paper due at midnight

3/2-3/10 Spring Break

Part III Writing Gender Relations

Constructing Womanhood

3/12 The alien beauty, or can a man marry an animal?

PDF Selected Tales on the alien beauty

* Rania Huntington, “Introduction,” in *Alien kind: foxes and late imperial Chinese narrative* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

Writing Activity: introducing the final project

3/14 “Nie Xiaoqian and Swordswoman”, from Pu Songling, *Strange Tales from Liaozhai*

3/19 Foot-binding and sexuality

Dorothy Ko, “The Written Word and the Bound Foot: A History of the Courtesan’s Aura” PDF Ko, Footbinding

* Dorothy Ko, *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet* (Univ. of California, Berkeley, 2001).

3/21 Experiences of Foot-binding

Wang Ping, *Aching for Beauty* (excerpt)

* Patricia Ebrey, “Gender and Sinology: Shifting Western Interpretations of Footbinding,” in *Late Imperial China*

Homosexual and Homosocial

3/26 Writing Session

Discuss your final paper proposal

3/28 Male Homosexuality

Li Yu, "House of Gathered Refinements" PDF

Li Yu, "A Male Mencius's Mother" PDF

* Cuncun Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China*, Ch. 2.

4/2 Female Homosexuality

Li Yu, *Cherishing Fragrant Companion* (selected scene)

Shen Fu, "Joys of Wedding Chamber" from *Six Records of a Floating Life*

4/4 Guest lecture by Prof. Yanbing Tan

Wang Yun, *Dream of Splendors* (selected scenes PDF Dream of Splendors 1,2,3, 7, 8,9, 19,20,23,24,25)

Part IV New Women and New China

4/9 The Birth of Chinese Feminism

"Introduction" in Lydia He Liu, Rebecca E. Karl, Dorothy Ko eds., *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory* (E-book at VU library)

4/11 Film-screening: *Autumn Gem* OR peer review of final papers

* "The Beheaded Feminist: Qiu Jin", in *Red Brush*, 767-808 (focus on 767-775, 779-784, 794-796, 807-808)

4/16 Past, Present, Future: Review and Reflection

4/18 Writing session:

Presenting your final paper

4/20 Final paper due at midnight

ca. 4/27 class magazine completed

(class schedule and readings are subject to change)