

Course syllabus HIST 407/507

Seminar: Exceptional Women of China

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Winter 2020

Seminar: Exceptional Women of China

Instructor: Professor Ina Asim

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Course Description

Throughout most of China's long history, women were not afforded the social or political status, the rights, and opportunities enjoyed by men. They were subject to indoctrination, domination, and abuse to fit the roles men, fathers, husbands, and sons held for them. In general these statements quite accurately describe the situation of Chinese women in traditional times – and in certain ways again today. However, in the past two decades more differentiated insights into lives of women have become possible. Academic studies by historians, archaeologists, sociologists, and researchers in literary studies (among other disciplines) in China and abroad have enriched our views of the traditional and contemporary roles of women in China dramatically. Such studies show that stereotypes should be discarded in favor for more versatile and multi-faceted studies that include exceptions to the rule: during which times and in which social and geographical settings were rules for women less strictly applied; under which circumstances and during which time periods were (individual) women able to circumvent or neglect the rigid limitations prescribed for them; other women 'made history' because they surpassed the strict rules by even greater limitations they self-imposed. Yet others sacrificed their lives to improve the social conditions for following generations. New resources have become accessible, which demonstrate that at times the written sources stipulate restrictions while the archaeological record or literary works present different realities. During the late imperial and modern periods the liberation of women was interpreted as a condition not only for modernization, but national salvation. Since the advent of post-socialist capitalism the trend has taken yet another turn: Enforced for 36 years (1979-2015) the one-child policy created a surplus in the male population. It is estimated that twenty million more men than women live in China today. Highly educated and usually employed in good professional positions, many of these women are pressured by government propaganda, social media, and (re-kindled) family preference for male offspring into the 'marriage market'. Blamed to be 'selfish' they are told to be 'left-over women' if they have not married by age 25. The consequences are dire. 'Left-over women' who are made into the social instruments to release the pressure from the surplus of men, whose frustration and potential for violence is deeply feared by the authorities,

often give up their jobs and write over property rights to their husbands or boyfriends, risking their own social demise in case of a divorce. Only very recently have women found the courage to speak up against the enormous social pressure, to act in solidarity with women in similar circumstances and to follow their personal goals against 'all odds'.

In this course, we will first seek a differentiated picture of the situation of women in traditional China, considering both orthodox rules and examples of unorthodox women defying the rules. Following a chronological trajectory we will then learn about the roles ascribed to women by republican reformers, their communist successors, and the current post-socialist regime. We will explore texts in which women of different time periods and from various social backgrounds wrote about their wishes, hopes and dreams. At the same time we will study relevant critical theoretical texts that complement the sources from the brushes of women.

What you can expect to learn in this course:

1. Gain a deeper understanding of the historical experiences recorded about or by Chinese women.
2. Understand the key cultural and social values that shaped women's lives during specific time periods and the changes initiated by politics, religion, ethical ideologies etc. that evolved over time.
3. Learn about the social framework for women's lives: What expectations did women have to meet at different times? How did they adhere to the 'mold' while changing the 'content' of such roles? How was the idea of the 'new women' shaped in early Republican China? How did it promise to fit into the concept of 'modernization'?
4. Understand the discrepancies between traditional role models created and enforced for women, and women's interpretation and agency regarding such roles. Learn about the important women of each historical and how they individually promoted, adhered to, or escaped from the roles assigned by society to them.
5. Develop analytical skills through critical reading, clear writing, and introducing concepts as discussion leaders.
6. Cultivate speaking and listening skills through in-class discussion.

Course Requirements

Attendance, participation, and weekly reaction papers for weeks 2-8: 20%

Attendance is mandatory. More than one unjustified absence will automatically be penalized with one letter grade. Participation is evaluated on the basis of the student's engagement with the discussions in class and the quality of the weekly written reports.

These reaction papers (ca. 2 pages) should include short summaries of key arguments

presented by the author(s) under review, and no fewer than three stimulating questions for discussion in class.

Oral Presentation: 20%.

Each week, one or two students will be in charge of opening the class session and leading the discussion by offering a critical commentary of the materials and presenting issues and themes to the rest of the class. These presentations will last about 15 minutes. Students should avoid offering lengthy summaries of the readings and must focus, instead, on the theoretical, historiographical, comparative, and critical issues stemming out of the reading(s).

Paper proposal (due on January 20): 10%.

The proposal will consist of one page describing the selected topic of the paper, the research question(s) that the paper will address, the sources the student will use, and a tentative bibliography. Although late proposals will be accepted, they will not receive any points towards the student's grade.

Final research paper (20-25 pages): 50%.

Students will choose a topic related to the content of the course and use the best and up-to date bibliography available on their topic, including primary sources. I will be available for consultation on paper topics and bibliographical assistance.

Readings: PDFs of articles and book chapters will be available through Canvas. Books will be placed on reserve at Knight Library.

Schedule of Sessions and Readings

January 6: Introduction & Bibliography

January 13: History of Women in East Asia: China, Japan, Korea;

Required Reading:

1. Susan Mann, 'Women in East Asia: China, Japan, Korea'. Chapter 2 of Bonnie G. Smith (ed.), *Women's History in Global Perspective*. Vol. 2. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005, 47-100. (Canvas module "Assigned Readings")

2. Bret Hinsch, "Ten Chinese Books that Changed our View of Women's History", *Nannü* 20 (2018), 153-167.
(online JSTOR)

3. Robin Yates, Danni Cai, Bibliography of Studies on Women and Gender in China since 2008. *Nannü* 20 (2018), 3-152. (online JSTOR)

4. Du, Fangqin and Cai Yiping, Localizing the Study of Women's History in China", *Chinese Studies in History* (2012), 45.4, 7-23. (online EBSCO)

January 20: Martin Luther King Jr. Day; no class

Paper proposals due Tuesday, 1/21 5:00 pm in my mailbox or under my door

January 27: Women in Early Imperial China: The Virtues of Education

Required reading:

1. Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2002. Introduction, Chapters 1-6; 1-128 (online)
2. Selected biographies: Fu Hao, Ban Zhao, Wu Zetian, Yang Guifei; (Canvas module "Assigned Readings")
3. Joan Judge and Hu Ying (eds.), *Beyond exemplar tales: women's biography in Chinese history*. Berkeley, Calif.: Global, Area, and International Archive, University of California Press, 2011. Section 'Alternative biographical sources': Epitaphs and Fiction (chapters 8, 9, 10); 139-192. (on reserve)
4. Lisa Ann Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998. 1-112 (on reserve)
5. Olivia Milburn, 'Instructions to Women: Admonitions Texts for a Female Readership in Early China.' *Nannü* (20), 2018, 169-197. (online)
6. Huitzu Lu, "Women's Ascetic Practices During the Song". *Asia Major*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2002), 73-108. (online)
7. Huishu Lee, "The Emperor's Lady Ghostwriters in Song-Dynasty China", *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 64, No.1 (2004), 61-101. (online JSTOR)

February 3: Education by Women, Women as Writers and Artists

Required Reading:

1. Patricia Ebrey: The Inner Quarters (Canvas module "Assigned Readings")
2. Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* (Canvas module "Assigned Readings")
2. Ronald Egan: The Burden with Female Talent (Canvas module "Assigned Readings")

3. Selected biographies: Li Qingzhao; (Canvas module "Assigned Readings")

February 10: Part I: Women at the Margins: Nuns, Actresses, Courtesans, Prostitutes

Required Reading:

1. Daria Berg, "Cultural Discourse on Xue Susu, a Courtesan in Late Ming China", *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 2009, Vol. 6, No. 2, 171-200. (online)
2. Daria Berg, "Courtesan Editor: Sexual Politics in Early Modern China", *T'oung Pao* 99, 1-3, 173-211. (online)
3. Luo Suwen, "Gender on Stage: Actresses in an Actor's World (1895-1930)", in Bryna Goodman, Wendy Larson (eds.), *Gender in Motion. Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2005, 75-96. (online, eBook)

Part II: Early Reformers and Feminists: Liang Qichao, Zhen Heyin, Qiu Jin

1. He-Yin Zhen: "On the Questions of Women's Labor"; (Canvas module "Assigned Readings": contained in Liu, Karl, Ko (eds.), *The Birth of Chinese Feminism*)
2. He-Yin Zhen: "The Feminist Manifesto"; (Canvas module "Assigned Readings" contained in Liu, Karl, Ko (eds.), *The Birth of Chinese Feminism*)
3. Liang Qichao: "On Women's Education"; (Canvas module "Assigned Readings" contained in Liu, Karl, Ko (eds.), *The Birth of Chinese Feminism*)

February 17: Women of the Republican Era: The Quest of Modernity

Required Reading:

1. Jin Tianhe, "The Women's Bell" (will be available on Canvas)
2. Tan Barlow, "Event, Abyss, Excess: The Event of Women in Chinese Commercial Advertisement, 1920s-1930s." *Differences* Vol. 24, No. 2 (online)
3. Joan Judge, "Between *Nei* and *Wai*: Chinese Women Students in Japan in the Early Twentieth Century", in Goodman and Larson (eds.), *Gender in Motion. Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2005, 121-141. (online, eBook)
4. Madeleine Yue Dong, "Unofficial History and Gender Boundary Crossing in the Early Chinese Republic: Shen Peizhen and Xiaofengxian", in Goodman and Larson (eds.), *Gender in Motion. Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2005, 169-187. (online, eBook)
5. Kenneth Pomeranz, "Women's Work and the Economics of Respectability", in Goodman and Larson (eds.), *Gender in Motion. Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2005, 239-263. (online, eBook)
6. Bryna Goodman, "The Vocational Woman and the Elusiveness of "Personhood" in Early Republican China", in Goodman and Larson (eds.), *Gender in Motion. Divisions of Labor and*

Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2005, 265-286. (online, eBook)

February 24: “**Left-Over women**”

Required reading:

1. Sandy To, “Understanding ‘Sheng Nü’ 剩女 (“Leftover Women”): the Phenomenon of Late Marriage among Chinese Professional Women”. *Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (February 2013), 1-20. (online, JSTOR);
2. Sandy To, *China's leftover women: late marriage among professional women and its consequences*. Routledge 2017. Chapters 1,4,7,8. (Canvas module "Assigned Readings")
3. Leta Hong-Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (Asian Arguments). Zed Books; 2nd edition (September 15, 2016); (online; eBook);
4. Deborah Davis, "Who Gets the House? Renegotiating Property Rights in Post-Socialist Urban China", *Modern China* 36.5: 463-492. (online)

March 2 and March 9: No class meetings. Students will work on their papers and will meet individually with the instructor during the assigned time slots (will be discussed in session of week 8).

FINAL PAPERS DUE: Wednesday, March 11, 5 pm.