Course: SOCL 280
Term: Spring 2016
Instructor: Prof. Ian Johnson
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Course Description:
This course will explore the contemporary social situation of China's major religions by reading texts, visiting places of worship and discussing issues with practitioners. The goal is to see how China's religious renaissance is unfolding at the grassroots level, and how that renaissance impacts Chinese society.

Chinese society is increasingly driven by the twin forces of State power and spiritual curiosity. The historical development of the country has been marked by encounters between authorities and social actors of many sorts, more recently by groups who take their direction from religion.

While other courses in the TBC curriculum look at religions in China in the manner of a historical survey or at the history of Christianity in particular, this class will examine recent and current challenges to the way religion is practiced.

We will spend time looking at the five authorized religions in China for insight, but this course will also use case studies to look at trends and directions away from the mainline spiritual establishment, as well as splits within the religious communities on what and how to worship. We will look at sects; at how worship has been practiced historically and locally; and why religious revival in China is occurring at the grassroots level more and more often. We will read relevant texts, and we will examine places of worship and speak with practitioners to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of religious renaissance in Chinese society.

Course Outcomes:
This course looks at the complex interaction of society and religion in contemporary China. By seeing places of worship, talking to practitioners and reading relevant texts, students will gain a nuanced understanding of contemporary Chinese religious life.

Some of the key topics to be explored and questions to be answered are:
* the formal theory that the Party uses to organize religious life versus the informal networks that actually guide much religious life. Examples to be explored here include the persistence of unregistered Daoist priests or churches and the growth of hermits, all of which are illegal but exist either with or without the Party's knowledge. Why are these networks and the practices they embrace tolerated in some cases or pushed aside in other instances?
  * the unregulated existence of what is arguably China's largest religion, folk religion, which includes the worship of local gods, ancestors and geographic features. Why does the Party not formally register such practices and what are the results of this policy?
  * tensions between commerce and religion; some places of worship in China exist primarily as tourist attractions. How do practitioners deal with this?
  * in some cases, religious belief and practice can take on a political hue and become a form of dissent. While this colors much of the West's view of religious life in China (i.e. reports of crackdowns on places of worship), how common is this? When it does occur, are their common points between faiths?

Course Requirements and Form of Assessment:
(percentage of final grade in parentheses)
  Weekly quizzes/class participation (30%). Quiz will cover assigned reading material for that week and whatever else comes into my head (including news items of relevance to the course).
  Mid-term (30%). Will encompass material in first half of semester.
  Final paper (40%). Students will write a paper exploring the social challenges associated with religious life in contemporary China. The topic will be set with the instructor shortly before the mid-term, in accordance with the class schedule (see below).

Attendance policy:
  Students are required to attend class. Course work (including weekly quizzes) cannot be made up except in the case of a serious medical emergency documented in writing. Only valid medical or family emergencies qualify as an absence, and documentation of the same must be presented to the professor no later than the next class meeting.

Academic Honesty Statement:
  Please click the following link to see the Loyola University Chicago/Beijing Center Academic Honesty Statement: http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml

Required texts:
  --*The Religious Question in Modern China.* By Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2011.)

--The Missionary’s Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village. Henrietta Harrison. (University of California Press. 2013.)

Articles:
(the following list does not include government documents and newspapers articles that the professor will make available). Students who find themselves unable to procure this material should contact the professor at least 1 week in advance of the assigned time for these readings.

--"Two Temples, Three Religions and a Tourist Attraction" by Xiaofei Kang, Modern China, Volume 35 Number 3, May 2009 227-255.
--"Popular Religion in Contemporary China" by Fan Lizhu. Social Compass 2003; 50; 449.

Class schedule
(Please note: visits to locations are tentative, given the challenges of logistics and other arrangements. Students are expected to leave their own plans open to accommodate meetings and visits that take place outside of class time.)

Jan 15
First class--Housekeeping, intros and coordinating our schedules to set up visits to churches and temples on non-class days. Introductory lecture: The Twentieth Century Disaster.

Jan 22
Second class--What is Chinese religion? What is special about religious life in China? What are commonalities in all religions? Why was this a problem for Chinese modernizers in the 20th century?

Readings due: The Religious Question in Modern China Intro, Chapters 1 & 2.

→POSSIBLE EXCURSION JAN 25/26 TO PRE-CHEINESE NEW YEAR TEMPLE FESTIVAL "XIAONIAN"小年 AT GUANDI TEMPLE ON 4TH RING ROAD.

Jan 29

NO CLASS. STUDENTS IN YUNNAN

Feb 5

NO CLASS. STUDENTS IN YUNNAN

Feb 12

Third class--Formal structures: official policy. How does the state organize religions in China? What are the common points in regulating all faiths? Why does the government limit the number of official faiths to five?


Feb 19

Fourth class--Formal structure: Grey areas. What are the change that the government has made to religious organization in the past decades? What was this in response to? What are some of the driving forces behind the boom in construction of places of worship? How does the government see religion as a support to its ideology?

What is the market theory of religious growth in China? How do new religions fit into this? How has the government chosen to control this?


Feb 26

No class; National Day holiday

March 5

Fifth class--Informal structures: Role of much-maligned folk (popular) religion. What is folk religion and is it a legitimate religious category? Why does the government not regulate it? What have been the effects of this? What does this say about Chinese religion in general and the difficulty in regulating it?

March 12
Sixth class--Informal structures. Complete Qigong material. Why do many actors in society find it easier to accept belief in new religions than the five official faiths?
Readings due: Qigong Fever Ch. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. Optional Wild Grass: ch. 3

March 19
Seventh class--Mid-term; topics for final papers due

March 26
No class; students in Shandong.

April 2
Eighth Class--Ni family visit. This family runs a pilgrimage society that we'll visit at the Miaofengshan Temple Fair at the end of the term.

April 9
Ninth Class--How are churches organized in China? What are the main organizations?
Various newspaper articles on contemporary church situation

April 16
Tenth Class
→ visit to church
Readings due: Missionary's Curse 5-7
"Chinese Protestant Christianity Today."

April 23
Eleventh class--Religion and Commerce. Is there a link between religion and entrepreneurial activity? What is the effect on religion? Commerce? Religion and Commerce. How are places of worship financed? What is the role of commerce? Is there a backlash among believers and if so, how is this being played out today?
Readings due: ""Two Sides of a Mountain." "The Spiritual Land Rush: Merit and Morality in New Chinese Buddhist Temple Construction" "Two Temples, Three Religions and a Tourist Attraction"

April 30
No class; May holidays

May 7
Twelfth class--Transnational Religions
likely hold this class on May 9; visit Miaofengshan temple outside Beijing and see Ni family in action.
Discuss Tibetan Buddhism.

May 16
Thirteenth class--papers due, final discussions.
Religious Life, Conclusion.

ends