EAST 351 WOMEN WRITERS OF CHINA (Fall 2020)

Instructor: Wang Wanming
Time: 2:35 AM-3:55 PM, Monday and Wednesday
Office hours: Monday 1:00-2:30 PM, or by appointment
Email address: wanming.wang@mcgill.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

The course examines a variety of textual forms and genres of writing – poetry, fiction, drama, letters, diaries, travelogues, etc. – by women in imperial China from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Close readings of texts will focus on the manipulation of language and literary devices and the construction of voice and subject positions from the perspective of gender. We will also pay attention to women’s lives, gender relations, and the socio-historical contexts and thematic contents of their writings. Our discussions will be based on primary sources drawn from the main textbook The Red Brush to understand and interpret women’s own words. Secondary articles by some of the most well-known scholars in this field will provide additional context and information as well as different and often thought-provoking perspectives. All readings are in English and available on myCourses.

Central questions that we will explore and attempt to answer include: what class and category of women wrote and under what social and historical circumstances did they write? Why, how, and what did they write in imperial China? What motivated them? What genres were especially favored by and/or considered “appropriate” for women writers? Can we detect or intuit a “feminine voice” in the writings of women that distinguishes their works from those written by men? Our consideration of these and other questions will enhance and deepen our understanding of the range and contents of Chinese women’s literary production, the forces shaping women’s writing in China, the significance of writing in women’s lives and culture, and the role of women writers in the literary-historical tradition.

TEXTBOOK:

COURSE FORMAT:
Lecture and discussion. Live class sessions will be delivered on Zoom and recorded. Pre-recorded lectures may be used when necessary.

Recordings of each class and PowerPoint slides will be available on myCourses. Students who are in other time zones and unable to attend classes regularly are required to post responses and questions on “Discussions” in myCourses for each class they cannot attend.

In view of the current uncertain situation, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course may be subject to change.
Office hours will be held on **Zoom** each week.

**METHODS OF EVALUATION:**

1. **Class participation (5%)**
   Students must read the assigned materials before each class and come prepared with questions and observations on the readings for the week. Those who cannot attend the live Zoom classes because of time difference must listen to the recordings of the lectures they miss and post a short comment or question on the Discussion Forum in myCourses. All students are encouraged to raise questions and comments in class or on the Discussion Forum on issues arising from the assigned texts and critical studies.

2. **Two short essays (30%): 4-5 typed, double-spaced pages**
   1) Choose one scholarly article from the assigned readings to respond to these questions: What are the main points of the article? What approach does the author take to analyze the selected texts? How does the article advance your understanding of the topic or issues concerned? 2) Close reading of a text by a Chinese woman writer and comment on the text’s gendered aspects or lack thereof. The first essay is to be submitted in class on Sept. 30; the second on Oct. 26.

3. **Oral Presentation of reading material (10%)**
   Everyone is required to do a 10-15 minute prepared presentation that should critically summarize the main points and arguments of weekly readings, engage the topic in a creative manner, and raise thought-provoking questions. Students who are not able to present in class need to submit a written or audio version of their presentations with PowerPoints before class.

4. **Paper proposal with preliminary bibliography (15%)**
   A two-page double-spaced proposal (plus a bibliography of at least four items) is due in class on Nov. 11. The purpose of the proposal is to identify the feasibility of your research project (i.e., select a topic, identify key works that will serve as the basis for the paper) and ensure that you begin research on the final project early in the term.

5. **Final paper (40%): 8-10 typed, double-spaced pages**
   Due Dec. 9 before 23:59pm.

   Late submissions: 1% per day will be deducted from the assignment.

*McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).*

*In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.*

**CLASS SCHEDULE:**
WEEK 1
SEPT. 2 (W) COURSE OVERVIEW

UNIT 1: EARLY MODELS
WEEK 2
SEPT. 7 (M) THE HAN DYNASTY AND BEFORE: SCHOLARS AND TEACHERS
*The Red Brush*, 11-42 (Ban Zhao), 52-53 (Fu Sheng’s mother).

SEPT. 9 (W) THE HAN DYNASTY: NEGLECTED PALACE LADIES AND LEGENDARY WRITERS

WEEK 3
SEPT. 14 (M) THE JIN DYNASTY AND THE SOUTHERN DYNASTIES: TALENTED WOMEN
*The Red Brush*, 42-54 (Zuo Fen, Han Lanying, Bao Linghui, Wei Cheng’s mother), 127-144 (Su Hui, Xie Daoyun), 146-153 (Liu Lingxian).

SEPT. 16 (W) THE TANG DYNASTY: SCHOLARS AND POETS
*The Red Brush*, 54-57 (the Song sisters), 100-107 (Concubine Plum), 174-195 (Li Ye, Xue Tao, Yu Xuanji).
Maureen Robertson, “Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Medieval and Late Imperial China,” *Late Imperial China* 13.1 (June 1992), 63-110, esp. 63-79.

WEEK 4
SEPT. 21 (M) THE TANG DYNASTY: SHANGGUAN WAN’ER
*The Red Brush*, 61-71 (Shangguan Wan’er).

SEPT. 23 (W) THE SONG DYNASTY: BACKGROUND

WEEK 5
SEPT. 28 (M) THE SONG DYNASTY: POETS AND THEIR MARRIAGES
*The Red Brush*, 204-256 (Li Qingzhao, Zhu Shuzhen).

SEPT 30 (W) THE SONG DYNASTY: LI QINGZHAO
Essay 1 due in class
UNIT 2: THE FLOURISHING OF WOMEN’S LITERATURE IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA

WEEK 6

OCT. 5 (M) COURTESANS (I)
The Red Brush, 347-382 (Courtesans).

OCT. 7 (W) COURTESANS (II)
Wai-yee Li, “The Late Ming Courtesan-Invention of a Cultural Ideal,” Writing Women in Late Imperial China (Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang eds. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 46-73.

WEEK 7

OCT. 12 (M) THANKSGIVING DAY

WEEK 8

OCT. 14 (W) IDEAL

OCT. 19 (M) LITERARY FAMILIES (I)
Dorothy Ko, “Domestic Communities: Male and Female Domains,” Teachers of the Inner Chambers, 179-218.

OCT. 21 (W) LITERARY FAMILIES (II)
The Red Brush, 383-414 (Shen Yixiu and her daughters).

WEEK 9

Essay 2 due in class

OCT. 26 (M) THE CULT OF QING
The Red Brush, 499-515 (Du Liniang, Xiaoqing)

OCT. 28 (W) MING-QING TRANSITION (I)
Wai-yee Li, “Female Voices Appropriating Masculine Diction,” Women and National Trauma in Later Imperial Chinese Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), 99-112.

WEEK 10

NOV. 2 (M) MING-QING TRANSITION (II)
Wai-yee Li, “Female Voices Appropriating Masculine Diction,” Women and National Trauma in Later Imperial Chinese Literature, 112-130, 157-197.

NOV. 4 (W) WOMEN’S LITERARY LIVES (I)

**WEEK 11**

**NOV. 9 (M) WOMEN’S LITERARY LIVES (II)**
Grace Fong, “Authoring Journeys: Women on the Road,” *Herself an Author* Gender Agency, and Writing in Late Imperial China (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016), 85-120.

**NOV. 11 (W) WOMEN’S LITERARY LIVES (III)**
*Paper proposal due in class*

**WEEK 12**

**NOV. 16 (M) WOMEN’S LITERARY NETWORKS (I)**

**NOV. 18 (W) WOMEN’S LITERARY NETWORKS (II)**

**WEEK 13**

**NOV. 23 (M) WOMEN’S LITERARY NETWORKS (III)**

**NOV. 25 (W)**

**WOMEN’S LITERARY NETWORKS (VI)**
*The Red Brush*, 593-620 (Xi Peilan, Luo Qilan).
Robyn Hamilton, “The Unseen Hand: Contextualizing Luo Qilan and Her Anthologies,” *The Inner Quarters and Beyond*, 107-140.

**WEEK 14**

**NOV. 30 (M) DRAMA AND VERSE FICTION**

**DEC. 2 (W) NATIONALISM AND FEMINISM**
*The Red Brush*, 765-808 (Qiu Jin).
DEC. 3 (TR) CONCLUSION

DEC. 9 (W) FINAL PAPER DUE