This course is a colloquium that meets once a week for approximately two hours. The most important feature of a colloquium is close reading and thoughtful, carefully argued discussion. Therefore, notes should be taken on the readings and reviewed before class so that you have already thought over issues of fact, interpretation and analysis. This also means that the week's reading assignment should not be left until the night before class. In order to facilitate and encourage thoughtful and engaged reading, every week each member of the group should prepare a position paper of 500 words or so based on the readings for the upcoming class. The paper should address some key issue or problem raised by the reading; it will form a basis for discussion in class. By Saturday afternoon, you should post your position paper on the Discussion Board on the Blackboard website for this course. This will insure that we all have a chance to read each other's thoughts and have the opportunity to respond if we so desire. Information on using Blackboard can be found at http://www.oberlin.edu/OCTET/Bb/. Notice the link for a FAQ for students.

Besides completing the reading and participating in class discussions (which includes preparation and submission of the weekly essay), students will be responsible for three short papers, spaced approximately evenly throughout the semester. The last will be due at the end of reading period. A topic will be assigned for each paper that will require around 5-8 pages of analysis of issues arising from the reading and class discussions. Please submit work through the Digital Dropbox or by e-mail enclosure.

All assignments must be completed to receive credit for the course. Because we only meet for twelve substantive sessions and because participation in discussions is so central to our common project, excessive absences will adversely affect your grade. (No absences are expected; more than one is excessive.) If a situation arises where more than one absence is unavoidable, come talk to me about it; I try to be a reasonable person.

The topic of this semester's colloquium is gender, marriage, and family in China. We will mainly focus on the period from late imperial times to the present (17th century on). While the three categories in the title of the colloquium are closely interrelated our focus on each will allow us to explore various important dimensions of Chinese conceptions regarding these three areas of human experience, as well as the convergence and contestation of norms in Chinese society over time.

In examining gender we will explore traditional ideas concerning male and female as fundamental and interrelated forces running through all phenomenal existence, as well as more mundane notions of male/female difference in Chinese society. Gender roles and the relation of gender and sexualities will be explored. The status of women in this patriarchal and largely patrilineal society will also be a central theme, especially focusing on how the category of "women" has been constructed as an ideological means to voice concerns about norms and social order in Chinese society.

The focus on marriage will allow us to examine changing forms of marriage across time, variant forms of
marriage, the social and individual power dynamics of marriage, and the interrelationship of forms of exchange surrounding marriage, such as dowry or bride price, with changing social formations.

Family is a core category of Chinese social and political forms, and reading and discussion around this topic will allow us to bring into focus many of the themes developed in other sections of the course, and in particular to look at the important role of the state and the literate elite in shaping norms regarding gender, marriage, and family.

The reading for the semester will focus on a number of important works and a selection of articles that have arisen out of the conjunction of women's and gender studies, on the one hand, and Sinological research on the other. The books are listed immediately below.

Books available at the Oberlin Bookstore and on Reserve:


NOTE: Other than the three books listed above, all readings for the course can be found on the Blackboard site under Course Documents in PDF file format.

Honor Code: All work in the course is governed by the Honor Code. See http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-regs.html - honor

Course meetings:

Gender and Life-cycle in Late Imperial China

Sept. 12: Introduction to course: Looking at Gender in Chinese Society
Sept. 19: Joan Scott, Selections from Gender and the Politics of History
           Patricia Ebrey, ≥Gender and Sinology: Shifting Western Interpretations of Footbinding, 1300-1890,≤ Late Imperial China 20.2: 1-34 (December 1999)

Marriage and Social Formations in Chinese History

Women, Chastity and Suicide

Oct. 17: Paul S. Ropp, ‘Passionate Women: Female Suicide in Late Imperial China’ in Nan N. 3.1:3-21
Mark Elvin, ‘Female Virtue and the State in China’ in Past and Present 104 (August 1984): 111-52
Janet Theiss, ‘Managing Martyrdom: Female Suicide and Statecraft In Mid-Qing China’ in Nan N. 3.1:47-76

Oct. 22-30: Autumn Recess

Material and Domestic Life from a Feminist Perspective

Oct. 31: Francesca Bray, Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China, Introduction, Parts 1 and 2

Nov. 7: Bray, Technology and Gender, complete

Contemporary Women’s Voices


Women and the State: the Impact of Feminist Analysis on Chinese Studies


Dec. 5: Selections from Gilmartin, Engendering China.

Final Assessments

Dec. 12: Concluding Discussion (My house)

Final paper due no later than Monday, December 19, 2005