Worthy, Wise, Accomplished, and Depraved: The “Exemplary Women” of Ancient China

Biographies of Exemplary Women is a foundational source for traditional East Asian perspectives on women’s duties and prospects as moral agents. The text vividly recounts personal dilemmas, political tragedies—and the ingenious, courageous, or otherwise remarkable solutions its heroines came up with to deal with them. It also tells cautionary tales of female vice and the social ruin it can cause. To modern eyes, many of these stories will be intensely frustrating: they presuppose rigid gender roles, interpret women’s lives primarily in terms of their impact on men, and offer women (no matter how worthy or wise) little hope of material or social advancement. But the text also praises women for bending or breaking social rules, honors them as teachers and leaders, and offers them as exemplars that men as well should emulate. Exploring these stories together will help us think through our own negotiations with roles and expectations, as well as posing challenging questions about the nature and value of individual autonomy.

REQUIRED TEXTS
## WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>TEXT/READING ASSIGNMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Week 1  
Date: April 9 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 1.1-1.10 (pp. 1-17) |
| Week 2  
Date: April 16 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 1.11-2.9 (pp. 18-37) |
| Week 3  
Date: April 23 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 2.10-3.9 (pp. 37-55) |
| Week 4  
Date: April 30 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 3.10-4.5 (pp. 56-72) |
| Week 5  
Date: May 7 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 4.6-5.3 (pp. 72-91) |
| Week 6  
Date: May 14 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 5.4-5.15 (pp. 91-108) |
| Week 7  
Date: May 21 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 6.1-6.11 (pp. 109-128) |
| Week 8  
Date: May 28 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 6.12-7.7 (pp. 128-145) |
| Week 9  
Date: June 4 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 7.8-8.9 (pp. 145-163) |
| Week 10  
Date: June 11 | Liu Xiang | Biographies 8.10-8.20 (pp. 163-182) |

This syllabus is a *summary of course objectives and content*, not a contract. All information in this syllabus is subject to change, with sufficient advance notice provided by the instructor.

### CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

As we may be addressing controversial topics in our class discussions, we expect students to be respectful and considerate of others.

### DISABILITY INFORMATION

Student Disability Services (SDS) works to provide resources, support and accommodations for all students with disabilities and works to remove physical and attitudinal barriers, which may prevent their full participation in the University community. Students that would like to request accommodations should contact SDS in advance of the first class meeting at 773.702.6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu.