In this project I will explore the roles and images of animals in medieval Chinese religious life, roughly from the third century to the eighth century. I have chosen to focus on this period because it was during this time that the interaction between Buddhism and indigenous Chinese traditions most closely concerned the natural world in general and animals in particular. In applying historical, religious studies, literary analysis, and anthropological approaches, I look into how animals were defined in Chinese religious traditions and how animals were written in the Chinese religious literature across the boundaries among Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Animals have been appearing as spirits, demons, and companions in Chinese religions writings. In reading and analyzing the different images of animals in these writings, I attempt to reveal how various social groups, such as the medieval state, eminent monks, and lay people, as well as literati and common people in pre-modern period have applied their zoological and ethnographical knowledge about the animals, nature and environment, their beliefs and practices in Buddhism and Daoism, and their Confucian values, to define animals, classifying animals, to develop the symbolic meanings of animals, and to make the roles of animals in their socio-cultural relations.

Research assistant's duties:
Undergraduate research assistant will be asked to read some selected chapters in secondary sources for summarizing main ideas and providing abstracts. The assistant will be also asked to proofread some English translations from Buddhist texts in Chinese sources and to make sure the translations are accessible to non-specialists.

Required skills, languages or qualifications:
English reading, writing, and editing, skills; must be majoring in humanities

Skills student will acquire:
reading, writing, and editing; familiarizing with academic writing and editing style.