



RELIGIONS OF ASIA

RELI 212:01

Fall 2018

TR 1:30-2:45, Innovation Hall 131

Professor: Prabhavati Reddy (preddy3@gmu.edu; 703-993-1290)

Office Hours: Tuesdays/Thursdays, 11:00-12:00 by appointment

Office: Robinson B443A

I. Course Description and Objectives

This cross-cultural course introduces students to the study of Asian religions and philosophies that have shaped profoundly the cultures of Asia in ancient and modern periods. Our inquiry begins with the exploration of some broader and important questions. What questions have Asians posed about the life-death-rebirth cycle of humankind? What teachings and paths have these religious traditions developed as responses to these questions? What practices have been promoted to achieve highest spiritual goals? While probing into these questions, we also explore the historical development of these traditions, focusing on major scriptures and figures, doctrinal beliefs and practices in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Confucian, Daoist, and Shinto religions.

Teaching Method

The format of this course will be a combination of lectures and in-class reading discussions. PowerPoint lectures with digital images are designed to engage students with subject themes effectively and to facilitate an interactive class environment. Complementing the class room teaching and discussions, student groups are required to do a field work project (“Meet Our Neighbors”) on Asian temples and communities in the Washington Metropolitan area.

Objectives

- Demonstrate basic knowledge of history, texts, doctrines, beliefs and practices of major Asian religions
- Develop an understanding of the ways the religions are developed into comprehensive systems of life in India, China and Japan
- Understanding of interconnections and differences among Asian cultures
- Gain a comparative perspective of Eastern values in relation to one’s own cultural and religious backgrounds
- Explore religion in social, political, economic and global contexts

II. Required Texts

1. Willard G. Oxtoby, ed., *World Religions: Eastern Traditions*, 4th edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
2. Ananda Maitreya, trans., *The Dhammapada*, Parallax Press, Reprint edition, 2001.
3. Barbara Miller, trans., *The Bhagavad-Gita*, Mass Market Paperback, 2002.
4. Handouts

III. Course Requirements

- **Regular attendance** of lectures and participation in class discussion are highly required. Students are responsible for all the announcements made during the classes as well as posted blackboard materials. Class absences are excused in the case of serious issues, decided on a case by case basis. Other classroom rules include: use laptops ONLY for notes taking; no text messages on phones and other gadgets; and not to leave the classroom in the middle of lecture or discussion unless you have to attend to an emergency situation.
- **Each student must fulfill all the course requirements to pass the course:** midterm (25%); final exam (25%); reflections & class participation (25%); and Group project (25%).
- **“Meet Our Neighbors” Group project & 5-page report:** Info on groups, assigned site visits and report will be provided by mid-September.
- **Bring the books to class:** Mandatory to bring required books for in-class group discussions. Taking notes is extremely important for the successful completion of the course and good grades.

Grade Evaluation

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| 1. Midterm (take home) | 25% (Syllabus covered up to Oct 25 th) |
| 2. Final exam (take home) | 25% (Jainism, Sikhism, East Asian) |
| 3. Reflections (3) and class participation | 25% (assigned readings in syllabus) |
| 4. Meet Our Neighbors group project & report | 25% (visit to temples & organized events in WDC metropolitan area) |

- IV. **Honor Code:** The George Mason University students should abide by the Honor Code and the guidelines of academic integrity are set by the university. You can find the information on the Honor Code at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. The violation of Honor code rules will be reported to the Honor Committee for review. Students who involve with plagiarism or cheating will meet with the severe penalties.

V. Schedule of Classes and Readings

Section 1: South Asian Religions and Philosophies

- 8/28 Course outline. What is the Academic Study of Religion?
- 8/30 Ancient Roots of Hinduism
Indus/Harappa Civilization; Oxtoby, *Eastern Traditions* 28-32
Films; *Hinduism, Scientifically Proven Religion & History of Hindu India*
- 9/4 Concept of God in Hinduism. One and Many
Purusha and Brahman in Vedas and Upanishads, *Eastern* 33-40; handout
film clip *Vedic chanting*
- 9/6 Hindu Trimurti or Trinity, *Eastern*, 44-50
- 9/11 Sri Krishna and concept of God, *Bhagavad-gita*, Selective verses in Chapters 8, 9,
10, 11; God in Vedanta theologies, *Eastern* 53-56
- 9/13 Hindu foundations: *dharma* (righteousness and morals), *karma* (action/duty/path),
samsara (rebirth) and *moksa* (ultimate goal, liberation or divine union) *Eastern*
37, 42-44; *Bhagavad-gita*, selective verses in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 12

Reflection-1 Due: Concept of God

- 9/18 Hinduism in Practice: temple religion, saints, bhakti/devotion; *Eastern*, 59-66, 69-
74
- 9/20 Practice: yoga & worship; *Eastern* 49-57; 76-89; *Bhagavad-gita*, Chapter 18
- 9/25 Hinduism in Modern Period, *Eastern* 66-69, 90-96
- 9/27 Foundations of Buddhism, Triple Gems; Shakyamuni Buddha, *Eastern* 186-198;
Dhammapada, 51-54, 103-110; *The Life Buddha* (BBC documentary film)
- 10/2 Foundations: Buddha dharma/teachings, *Eastern*, 198-204; *Dhammapada*, 1-23,
45-46, 75-78
- 10/4 Read *Dhammapada*, 29-31, 37-40, 63-65, 87-89; Bring the book
film: *The Footprint of Buddha*

10/9 Tuesday classes do not meet this week

Reflection-2 Due: No God, Non-Soul and Nirvana

- 10/11 Buddhism in Practice: The Sangha; Early Buddhism/Theravada, *Eastern* 209-217;
Dhammapada, 21-27, 97-101
- 10/16 Art and image reading assignment. No class.

- 10/18 Mahayana Buddhism in India, *Eastern*, 217-224, 231-232
- 10/23 Vajrayana Buddhism/Diamond Vehicle in Tibet, *Eastern*, 234-238;
film *Tibetan chants*
- Midterm Due by 10/23, 6:00 PM on Tuesday** (syllabus covered up to 10/23); Exam questions and instructions will be posted on the blackboard by October 20th)
- 10/25 Buddhism in China: Pure Land and Chan Schools, *Eastern*, 224-230 and 301-304
- 10/30 Buddhism in Modern World, *Eastern*, 246- 257
- 11/1 The Jain Tirthankaras and Schools, *Eastern*, 147-162
- 11/6 Jainism in practice; developments in modern period, *Eastern*, 162-178
film clip *Jain Bahubali Ritual*
- 11/8 The formation of Sikhism with ten Gurus, *Eastern Traditions* 105-119
- 11/13 Sikhism in practice; developments in modern period; *Eastern*, 122-142;
film *Sikh Gurudwara*

Section 2: East Asian Religions & Philosophies

- 11/15 Ancient Chinese Religion: The Shang and Zhou Periods; Confucian origins;
Eastern, 266-274
- 11/20 Master Confucius and his teachings; *Eastern*, 274-278;
Film: *Confucius Words of Wisdom*
- 11/21-25 Thanksgiving recess**
- 11/27 Confucian thinkers: Mencius and Xunzii, *Eastern*, 276-278; Han/State
Confucianism; *Eastern*, 286-293
- DUE in class: “Meet Our Neighbors” Group project & 5-page paper**
- 11/29 Dao in religious and philosophical Daoism; *Eastern*, 278-286, 293-294
- 12/4 Japanese Culture and Shinto, *Eastern*, 341-363
- 12/6 Global & Domestic trends in Japan, 367-376
- 12/18 Final Exam Due 6:00 PM** (syllabus covered from 10/25-12/6) Exam questions and instructions will be posted on the blackboard on December 17th by 10AM