



Rel. 103

Introduction to Asian Religions

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Fall 2013, Washington & Lee University
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This course introduces the thought and practices of the major religions native to South and East Asia, including the **Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Taoist, Confucian, and Shinto** traditions. The approach will be to read closely some great works to engage their views on the human condition, ideals of the life well spent, conceptions of the divine, and the relationship between the human being and God or the laws of the cosmos. We will see these ideas at work in “lived religion” — religion as it is practiced. Readings and discussion will be complemented by audio-visually and visits to Asian religious institutions.

Course Requirements

- i. Prepared attendance in class meetings. Participation in class discussions can raise your overall grade; more than one absence (except in cases of serious health problems or other emergency) will lower your grade; you should come to each class with a well-focused question or response based on the day’s readings, which you may be asked to contribute to the discussion.
- ii. Visits to the Shantiniketan Hindu Temple, in Roanoke; the Bodhi Path Buddhist Center, in Natural Bridge (either with the class or on your own); and W&L’s Japanese Tea Room.
- iii. Two 1500-word essays (each worth 25% of the final grade). Each student will choose a short primary text, in consultation with the instructor, and offer a careful analysis and interpretation.
- iv. An in-class midterm exam (25% of final grade).
- v. A 90-minute final exam (25% of final grade).

Books to purchase

Willard OXTOBY, *World Religions: Eastern Traditions*, 2nd ed. (Oxford U.P.).
Barbara Stoler MILLER, *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War* (Bantam).
W. Th. DE BARY, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1 (Columbia U.P.).
W. Th. DE BARY, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 1 (Columbia U.P.).

* Other course readings on Sakai.

Schedule of Classes and Readings

Some changes may be made in the assigned readings.

Weds., Sept. 4 Introductory meeting: *Rig-Veda* and *Upanishad* excerpts

South Asia

Week I Hindu Foundations: *Veda* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*
Tu: WR, pp. 30–47, 72(bottom)–81(top); * Johnson, “*Mahabharata* summary”
BhG, Introduction + Teachings 1–9
Th: *BhG*, Teachings 10–18 + Afterword
Film: Peter Brook’s “*Mahabharata*” (Part I)

Week II The Deeds of God on Earth: The Rama Story and the Bhakti Turn
Tu: WR, pp. 47–58(top), 61–67(top); *Ramayana* (first half)
Th: *Ramayana* (finish)

Week III Lord Shiva and Tantra
Tu: WR, pp. 58–61(top); * Davis, *Ritual in an Oscillating Universe* (excerpts)
Th:

Sunday: Trip to Roanoke Hindu Temple (tentative date)

Week IV The Sants and the Sikhs / Hinduism and the Modern World
Tu: WR, 67–69(top) and all of ch. 3; * Hawley, chs. 2–3
Th: WR, pp. 69–72 and 81–99.

Week V The Jains: Liberation through Asceticism
Tu: WR, ch. 3 + pp. 199–223
Th: READING DAY
FIRST ESSAY DUE 9 am FRIDAY

Week VI The Buddha’s Search and the Monk’s Path
Tu: WR, 178–198; * *Life of the Buddha*
Th: MIDTERM EXAM

East Asia

Week VII Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Tibet
Tu: pp. 198(Buddhism and the State)–211; * Aśoka’s Edicts; * *Chronical of Lanka (Mahavamsa, excerpts)*
Th: WR, 205–210(top) and 220(Vajrayana)–235; Life of Milarepa:
<http://www.samyem.org/mila.htm>
Video outside of class: “The Tibetan Book of the Dead”

- Week VIII Chinese Confucian Sages: Confucius' *Analects* and *Mengzi*
Tu: WR, 256–281(top); SCT, 3–13, 19–39, 41–49, 54–58, 64–71, 75–76
Th: WR, 281–294(top); SCT, 112–135, 147–150, 161–166.
- Week IX Chinese Daoist Sages: *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*
Tu: WR, 294–309; SCT, 77–94
Video: “Taoism: A Question of Balance”
Th: WR, 309–323; SCT, 95–111 and 392–414
- Week X Salvation by the Buddha: *The Lotus-Sutra* and the Pure Land Schools
Tu: WR, 210–213(top); SCT, 415–435
Visit to Bodhi Path Buddhist Center (tentative date)
Th: WR, 218(bottom)–220, 330–346, 349(Nichiren); SJT, 100–152; 292–305
- Week XI Chan / Zen: *Platform Sutra of the 6th Patriarch* and *Blue Cliff Records*
Tu: WR, 213–218; SCT, 491–529
Th: WR, 217–218 and 346(Rinzai Zen)–349(top); SJT, 306–335
Visit to W&L Tea Room

THANKSGIVING RECESS

- Week XII Shinto (Japan's Ancestral Religion) and the Impact of Buddhism
SECOND ESSAY DUE 9 am MONDAY
Tu: WR, 349(bottom)–354(top); SJT, ch. 1
Th: WR, 354–359; SJT, ch. 2 and 336–344

FINAL EXAM