



Rel. 103

Introduction to Asian Religions

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Fall 2008, 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, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and Shinto traditions. The approach will be to read closely selected 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-visuals 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. Visit 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).

Edward CONZE, *Buddhist Meditation* (Dover)

Lobsang P. LHALUNGPA, *The Life of Milarepa* (Penguin)

W. Th. DE BARY, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1 (Columbia U.P.).

* Other course readings on Blackboard.

Schedule of Classes and Readings

Some changes may be made in the assigned readings.

South Asia

- Week I Hindu Foundations: *Rig-Veda* and *Bhagavad-Gita*
Tu: WR, pp. 13–39; *RV* hymns; *BhG*, Introduction + Teachings 1–9
Th: *BhG*, Teachings 10–18 + Afterword
Video: “Hinduism: Elephant God”
Sunday: Trip to Roanoke Hindu Temple (tentative date)
- Week II The Deeds of God on Earth: The Rama Story / Popular Devotion
Tu: WR, pp. 39–57, 71–104; * “The Story of the Ramayana”
Th: * Hawley, Introduction and “Tulsidas”
- Week III Bhakti: Loving God in the Tamil *Tiruvaymoli*, a Theology of Vishnu
Tu: WR, pp. 57–67; * Carman/Narayanan, *Tamil Veda*, 3–33, 59–69, 86–97
Th: * Carman/Narayanan, *The Tamil Veda*, pp. 195–257 [2 hour class]
- Week IV The Sants and the Sikhs / Hinduism and the Modern World
Tu: WR, ch. 2; * Hawley, chs. 2–3
Th: NO CLASS; read WR, pp. 67–71, 104–117 [discuss next Tues.]
- Week V The Jains / The Life of the Buddha: *Buddhacharita*
Tu: WR, ch. 3 + pp. 199–223; * *Buddhacharita* selections [2 hour class]
Th: READING DAY
- Week VI The Buddha’s Path according to the Theravada: *Visuddhimagga*
FIRST ESSAY DUE 9 am MONDAY
Tu: Conze, 11–37, 140–157, 45–59, 62–85. 95–139 [2 hour class]
Th: MIDTERM EXAM

East Asia

- Week VII Tibetan Buddhism: *The Life of Milarepa*
Tu: WR, 243–252: *Milarepa*, chs. 1–6.
Video: “The Tibetan Book of the Dead”
Th: *Milarepa*, chs. 7–9.
Visit to Bodhi Path Buddhist Center (tentative date)

- Week VIII Chinese Confucian Sages: Confucius' *Analects* and *Mengzi*
Tu: WR, 352–362; SCT, pp. 3–13, 19–63
Th: WR, 362–377; SCT, pp. 112–124, 147–166, 170–183; 311–352
- Week IX Chinese Daoist Sages: *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*
Tu: WR, 382–398; SCT, 77–94
Video: “Taoism: A Question of Balance”
Th: SCT, 95–111 and 392–414
- Week X Salvation by the Buddha: *The Lotus-Sutra* and the Pure Land Schools
Tu: WR, 258–282, 398–412; SCT, 415–455; 481–491; 531–536
Th: * SJT, 100–152; 292–305
- Week XI Chan & Zen: *Platform Sutra of the 6th Patriarch* and *Blue Cliff Records*
Tu: WR, 283–308; SCT, 491–529
Th: * SJT, 306–335
Visit to W&L Tea Room

THANKSGIVING RECESS

- Week XII Shinto: Japan's Ancestral Religion
SECOND ESSAY DUE 9 am MONDAY
Tu: WR, pp. 341–352; * SJT, ch. 1
Th: WR, 412–422; * SJT, ch. 2 and 336–344; * Two imperial rescripts

FINAL EXAM