

REL STDS 100, Fall 2007  
12:35-1:50 Tues/Thurs  
CCC 303

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Office Hours: Tues 2-3 and Tues/Thurs 11-12:30  
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### **Asian Religions (alias Eastern Religions)**

The aim of this course is to provide an introductory look into the vast, multi-faceted major religious traditions of Asia, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. An introduction to Confucian, Taoist, and Shinto traditions helps us view the larger religious context in which Buddhism is practiced. These traditions are best seen not simply in isolation but as reflections of particular cultures as well as the political, socio-economic, diasporic, and gendered subgroups within these cultures.

We begin by addressing the “problem” of studying Asian religions from a North American classroom. In subsequent weeks we will examine some of the ways these traditions approach religious texts, cosmologies, and practices from a “classical” standpoint as well as from other perspectives that provide alternatives to or potentially challenge the former. We will also look at the ways modern Asian religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, have been influenced by and influence North American culture.

By studying Asian religions’ different manifestations and perspectives we gain an important sense of the complexity of these religious traditions which, in some instances, blurs or defies boundaries. This course therefore especially encourages participants to be patient as the larger picture unfolds and perhaps even forgo the need to generalize or define in a tidy manner the nature of Asian or “Eastern” religions.

#### **Required texts:** (\* = books available at Text Rental)

Burt, E.A. ed. *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha.*

\*Hawley, John and Juergensmeyer, Mark, eds. *Songs of the Saints of India.*

Narayan, R.K. *The Ramayana*

\*Oxtoby, Willard, ed. *World Religions: Eastern Traditions.*

Lao Tzu, ed. Stephen Mitchell, *Tao Te Ching* (recommended reading, also on electronic reserve).

#### **Articles on electronic reserve (ER):**

Mehta, Gita, selections from *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East.*

Harrison, Elizabeth, “Women’s Responses to Child Loss in Japan: The Case of Mizuko Kuyo.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 11/2: 67-93.

Boucher, Sandy, “Shasta Abbey.” *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism*, pp. 137-138, 141-144.

Hilton, Isabel, “Flight of the Lama.” *New York Times Magazine* 3/12/00, pp. 50-55.

### **Course requirements:**

- 1) Reflection papers: Students are required to write three reflection papers, 1-1½ pages in length, throughout the semester. This assignment, amounting to **15%** of total grade (5 points each) offers people an opportunity to express in writing thoughts about and impressions of assigned readings and class discussions. Reflection papers are due during the class period on the days they are assigned. Late papers are reduced one point for every day they are late.
- 2) Quizzes: Because this course requires students to enter a world of new terms and concepts, I will give two quizzes during the semester to ensure that these concepts and terms are becoming part of people's working vocabulary. **20%** of total grade (10% each).
- 3) Exams: Students will take two non-cumulative midterm exams during the semester worth **40%** of total grade (20% each). The final exam, although semi-cumulative, will be the same format and length of the midterm and worth **20%** of total grade.
- 4) Participation and Attendance: In the spirit of active rather than passive learning, I consider class discussion – whether in small groups or with the entire class – to be a crucial component. A **5%** “freebie-incentive” will be given to all those who consistently attend and regularly participate with comments and questions during class.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

9/4 Orientations and Introductions

9/6 Oxtoby pp. 1-8, Mehta (ER – optional pleasure reading)

#### Hindu Orthodoxy

9/11 Oxtoby pp. 13-22

9/13 Oxtoby pp. 50-62

9/18 Oxtoby pp. 80-87, 106-114

9/20 Oxtoby pp. 42-50, slides of gods and goddesses

#### The Bhakti Movement

9/25 Hawley ch. 2

9/27 Hawley ch. 5, **quiz**

#### The Ramayana

10/2 Narayan, slides

10/4 **ISKCON visitors** (continue reading *The Ramayana*)

10/9 Narayan, **reflection papers due**

#### Diaspora Hinduism

10/11 review

10/16 **Midterm exam**

The Three Buddhist Gems: Buddha, Dharma, Sanga

10/18 Oxtoby pp. 217-233, Burt pp. 39-46

Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhism

10/21 Oxtoby pp. 248-250, 254-258 Burt pp.120-122, film: *Making of a Monk*

10/25 Oxtoby pp. 266-270, 284-285, Burt pp. 130-134, 150-154, 161-166 (skim)

10/30 Oxtoby pp. 276-280, Hilton (ER)

11/1 **Quiz**, film: *Mystic Vision*

Pureland and Zen (Ch'an) Buddhism

11/6 Oxtoby pp. 274-276, 299-300

11/8 Kapleau (ER), film: *Practice*

11/13 **reflection papers due**, review

11/15 **Midterm exam**

**11/20 and 11/22 no class, Happy Thanksgiving**

Confucianism

11/27 Oxtoby pp. 387-390, 392-398

Taoism

11/29 Oxtoby pp. 418-422

12/4 *Tao Te Ching* (ER or purchase), film: *A Question of Balance*

Japanese Shinto and Folk Traditions

12/6 Harrison (ER)

Diaspora/Modern Buddhism

12/11 Boucher (ER), film: *Tashi Jong*, **reflection papers due**

12/13 review

**Final exam time:**

Tuesday, December 18<sup>th</sup> 8:00-10:00 am