

2009

RELI-152-01 Religions of Asia

E H. Jarow

Vassar College, jarow@vassar.edu

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Vassar College, Religion 152

An Introduction to Asian Religious Traditions

Fall Semester 2009

**Tuesday-Thursday 9:00-10:15
Kenyon 132**

Instructor: E. H. Jarow, Associate Professor of Religion & Asian Studies
Office: Blodgett 206, Ext. #5516, email: jarow@vassar.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 4:00-6:00, Wednesday by appointment

Course Requirements

Regular class attendance (more than two unexcused absences lowers your grade by one half letter), preparation for lectures and discussions by careful completion of reading and written assignments, participation in class discussions, two five page essays on assigned topics, to be posted on the blackboard and discussed with your “think tank,” an in-class mid-term, and a final take home examination. All requirements will be taken into account when calculating final evaluations for the semester.

Required Reading

***Analects of Confucius*, A. Waley, trans.**
***Bhagavadgita*, B.S. Miller, trans.**
The Rg Veda, Doniger\O'Flaherty, trans. (selections on e reserve)
The Upanishads, Olivelle, trans. (selections on e reserve)
Daodejung (Tao Te Ching), Lao-Tzu
The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo, Waddell, Abe trans. (e reserve)
Japanese Religious Traditions, Yusa (e reserve)
An Introduction to Hinduism, Lal
The Miracle of Mindfulness, Nhat Hanh
Speaking of Siva, Ramanujan (e reserve)
The Taoist Body, Schipper (e reserve)
Lotus Sutra (e reserve)
Monkey, Wu, Cheng-en (Waley, trans.)

CLASSES

9/1 Introduction to Course

Methodologies and Perspectives in the Study of Asian Religions: The Why and the How, What is “close reading?” The penchant for diversity

- *Recommended:* W.C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion; A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (selections on e-reserve)

Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine in India* (selections on e-reserve)

9/3 The Great Battles: Invasion, Ideology, and Mytho-History

- *Reading:* *Bhagavadgita*, Chapter One
Lal, pp. 3-13
Rg.Veda 1.1 (Hymn to Agni), 1.32 (Killing of Vrtra)
Thapar (e-reserve)

- ❖ *Discussion:* “*Dharmaksetra-Kuruksetra*”
The Indus valley, the *mythos* of the Veda, and the sources of Hindu culture
Is there a “just war?”

9/8 Karma Kanda and Jnana Kanda: Action, Sacrifice, and Knowledge

- *Reading:* *Bhagavadgita*, Chapter Two
Rg Veda: Hymns 1.50, 1.162, 7.89, 8.48, 10.129, 10.90
Lal, pp. 14-15

- *Recommended:* Panikkar, pp.88-112

- ❖ *Discussion:* The fundamental belief structures of Hindu India
The Vedic inheritance, *rta*, *sruti*, *smrti*, *yajna*, *deva*, *mantra*

9/10 Secret Knowledge: The Upanishads and the Path of *jnana*

- *Reading:* *Bhagavad Gita*, Three, Four
Chandogya (6,8)
Katha Upanishad

Lal, 2

○ *Recommended:* *Upanisads, Olivelle. Introduction*

❖ *Discussion:* The Self (*atman*) and the Absolute (*brahman*), *yoga*, monism vs. dualism, life after death, the problematics of *karma*

9/15 **Brahma-Nirvana: The Buddha in India**

□ *Reading:* *Bhagavadgita*
Nhat Hanh, *Miracle of Mindfulness, chapters 1-4*

❖ *Discussion:* Hagiography of Siddhartha Gautama, Buddhism as a heterodox protest movement, the four noble truths, dependent co-arising, the teaching of *anatman* (no self) vs. Upanishadic teachings on ultimate identity

9/16.....Evening Film

9/17 **Wisdom, Compassion, and Emptiness: Mahayana Buddhist Perspectives**

□ *Reading:* Nhat Hanh, chapters 5,6
“Asanga's Teaching of Great Compassion” (e-reserve)
Bhagavadgita,

❖ *Discussion:* The Buddhist *sangha*, practicing the *dharma*, critiques of *Theravada*, *sunyata*, *Mahayana* versus nihilism and absolutism, the implementation of compassion through skillful means, the *bodhisattva* and the emerging *Mahayana* pantheons, the bodies of the Buddha, *Vajrayana (tantra)*

9/22 **Dharma and the Aims of Humanity: The Rise of Hindu Traditions**

□ *Reading:* Lal, 44-55
Klostermaier, “The Heart of Hinduism” (e-reserve)
Bhagavadgita, Chapters Seven through Nine

❖ *Discussion:* Emerging religious and social values, the meaning and centrality of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*, class and gender dispositions in the Epics and Puranas, the story of Rama.

9/24 Krishna's Council in Time of War: The *Gita* as a Hindu Synthesis

- ❑ *Reading:* *Bhagavadgita*, Chapters Ten through Eighteen
Lal, 16-24, 56-66, 92-96
- ❖ *Discussion:* *yoga*, the paths of knowledge (*jnana*) and action (*karma*), moral relativism vs. situational ethics, the three qualities of nature. The ideal of *varnashrama* and the reality of *jati* (caste)

9/29 In Search of the Beloved

- ❑ *Reading:* *Speaking of Siva* (selectons)
Re-read *Bhagavadita*, chapters Nine and Twelve
Lal, 99-110
- ❖ *Discussion:* *bhakti* the "fifth aim of life" (*pancapurushartha*), monism vs. dualism, *bhakti*, ecstasy, and social reform, *guru*, *sastra*, *sadhu* "great:" and "little" traditions

9/30.....Evening Film: 330 Million Gods

→ First Essay Due (Freedom in Action)

10/1 Gods, Goddesses, and Social Structures

- ❑ *Reading:* Lal, 67-91, *Bhagavadgita* , reread Chapter 10
- ❖ *Discussion:* 330 Million Gods, Major and minor deities, The one and the many, the structures and divisions of Hindu worship, gods of flesh, gods of stone

10/6 Indian Religion Responds to Colonialism

- ❑ *Reading:* Tagore, *Sacrifice* (on reserve)
Lal, 111-121
Bhagavadgita, selected verses
- ❖ *Discussion:* Kali, religion and the state, interpretive authority,

the sacrifice of Jaising

10/8 Dharma Politics: India's Agony over Religion

- ❑ *Reading:* Miller, "Contending Narratives" (e- reserve)
Varshney, "Battling the Past, Forging a Future?" (e-res.)
Knipe, "Hinduism Today" (e- reserve)
Lal 122-171
- ❖ *Discussion:* Gandhi, Nehru, Sarvarkar: Three Visions of India's
Political Future
Roy, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda: Three Visions of India's
Spiritual Future

10/13 The Spiritual Gifts of Modern India

- ❖ *Discussion:* Ramana Maharashi, Aurobindo, Krishnamurti, Osho: Four
discourses on the Gita

10/15 Midterm Examination

October Break

10/27 Confucius and "The Ancients"

- ❑ *Reading:* The Analects, Book I-IV
Thompson (on e reserve)
- ❖ *Discussion:* Variables of Chinese religion: geography, climate, rivers,
cities, language, population, cultural values of the classical
Chinese tradition, myths of origin, Wade Giles and Pinyin

10/29 The Meaning of Tradition

- ❑ *Reading:* Analects
Thompson, II (e-reserve)
Coyle, Hexagrams (e-reserve)
Odes (e-reserve)
- ❖ *Discussion:* The foundations of classical culture, sacrifice and the concept

of heaven (*t'ien*), the Mandate of Heaven, *Shang* divination

11/3 Confucius: The Secular as Sacred

- *Reading:* The *Analects* (Books I-IX)
- ❖ *Discussion:* The cultivation of virtue, *jen*, *li*, *te* (*de*) *Hsiao* (*xiao*), the meaning of ritual. The centrality of the family and ancestry, the debate over human nature

11/5 The Way That Can Be Named Is Not the True Way

- *Reading:* Laozi, *Daode Jing*
Zuangzi - (e-reserve)
- *Recommended:* Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*
- ❖ *Discussion:* How does the Daoist ethos differs from the Confucian and Buddhist world view? What is meant by inaction (*wu-wei*)? The *Dao* in the world, who is “in the Dao?”

11/10 Why Bodhidharma came to the Middle Kingdom: Buddhist Transformations in China

- *Reading:* *Analects*,
Lotus Sutra (e reserve)
Wills: "Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch" (e-reserve)
Reed, “Gender Symbolism (e-reserve)
- ❖ *Discussion:* How did Buddhism integrate into Chinese religious culture? How did Chinese Buddhism differ from its Indian counterpart? From *Dhyan* to *Ch'an* to *Zen*, gradual versus sudden enlightenment.

11/12 Buddha in the Land of the Kami

- *Reading:* *Analects*,
Ono, "The Kami Way" (e-reserve)
Yusa, Chapters 1, 2 (e-reserve)
Kojiki (excerpts on e-reserve)
- ❖ *Discussion:* The interaction of Shinto, Confucian, and Buddhist sensibilities, interfacing of religious, economic, and political concerns, the

beauty of temporality and the evolution of Japanese religious values

11/17 Sitting Quietly, Doing Nothing

- ☐ *Reading:* Takahashi, “Dogen’s Life” (e-reserve)
Dogen’s *Shobogenzo* (e-reserve)
Koans, Norman Fisher (e-reserve)
- ❖ *Discussion:* Rinzai and Soto Zen, *Koans*, Beginner’s Mind

11/19 The Bureaucracy of Divinity: Popular Religion in China

- ☐ *Reading:* Analects,
Zito, “City Gods” (e-reserve)
Loewe, *The Gods* (e-reserve)
Yu, *Journey to the West* (e-reserve)
- *Recommended:* Chun Hoon, “My Chinese Side” (e-reserve)
- ❖ *Discussion:* Chinese temple worship, the “families of the Gods, divination *feng- shui*, relationship between Gods and humans, Guan Yin and the Bodhisattvas, the underworld, the festival seasons

11/24 Taoist Alchemy and the Elixir of Life

- ☐ *Reading:* Analects
Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, chapters 6-8 (e-reserve)
Monkey, Part I
- ❖ *Discussion:* The quest for immortality, the alchemical body, the eight immortals, yin, yang, and the five elements

→ Second Essay Due (Three Traditions)

11/26 No Class – Happy Thanksgiving!

12//1 The Triumph of Order: Neo Confucianism and the Dawn of Modernity

- ☐ *Reading:* Analects,
Thompson III
Ebrey, “Zhuxi’s Conversation” (e-reserve)

Monkey, Part II
Wills, "Wang Yangming" (e-reserve)

- ❖ *Discussion*: Why Confucians found themselves at odds with Buddhists, the Confucian temple and its rites, the relationship between knowledge and action, *li* and *chi*, class, gender, and religion, the rumblings of modernity

12/3 Pilgrimage to the Source: Spiritual Journeys Then and Now

- ☐ *Reading*: Analects
Monkey, Part III
- *Recommended*: "Taming an Ox" (e-reserve)
- ❖ *Discussion*: Integration of Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and Popular Religious traditions. Relationship between human and the supernatural, review of basic themes in the religious life of China, the irony of the ultimate

12/8 The Transformation of Tradition & Religion in Post-Colonial China

- ☐ *Reading*: Bell, Confucius in Modern China
Levenson, "Confucian China" (e-reserve)
De Bary, "Attack on Confucianism" (e-reserve)
Jones, "Nationalism and Women's Liberation" (e-reserve)
- ❖ *Discussion*: The impact of Colonialism, Mao Zedong and the "four olds," tradition and (dis)continuity, the gate of heavenly peace

12/9 ★ *Film*: *Sopyonje* (8:00pm)
(also 12/4)

12/10 Tradition and Modernity Revisited: *Sopyonje*

- ❖ *Discussion*: *Sopyonje*: Youbong as "tradition," Don-ho as "rebellion," Songhwa's "resolution," the fate of *pansori* in post-modernity

Recommended Reading

Basham, *The Wonder that was India*
Buck, W. *The Mahabharata, The Ramayana*
Goldman, et. al. *The Ramayana*
I-Ching or Chinese Book of Changes, Wilhelm, F., trans.
Kinsley, *The Goddess Mirror*
Kohn, Livia, *The Taoist Experience*
Miller, Barbara Stoler. *The Love Song of the Dark Lord , Theater of Memory*
Suzuki, Shunru, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*
Thurman, trans. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*
Watson, Burton, trans. *The Lotus Sutra, The book of Chuang-Tzu*
Wills, *Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History*
Zimmer, Heinrich. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*