

## Religion 105: Religions of the East Spring Semester 2007

**Meets:** Sec. 1 9:00-9:50 MWF  
Sec. 2 10:00-10:50 MWF

**Place:** 327 North Hall

**Credits:** 3

**Office Hours:** MW 11-1:15 or by appt.

**Instructor:** Dr. Fritz Detwiler

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### Course Description:

An introductory examination of selected non-Western religions from Africa and Asia. Specific traditions include the Zulu and Yoruba from Africa; Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism from South Asia; and Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shinto from East Asia. Format will be interactive lectures and films.

### Course Perspective:

The overall perspective employed in this course includes two closely related but distinct points of view. The first, and most general, is called the *academic study of religion*, the second the *phenomenological approach to the study of religion*.

The **academic study of religion** refuses to evaluate various religions using the standards of “truth” or “falsity.” In this sense, it differs significantly from the “theological” or “confessional” approach to religion which judges other religions from a faith standpoint. The academic method seeks first to understand a given religious tradition from the “inside,” that is, from the perspective of the people who accept the given religion as true. This requires students to be particularly attentive to the terms or vocabulary of that tradition and the assumptions about the world, reality, and humanity that distinguish that particular religion from other religions and worldviews.

Once we have begun to understand the religion from the “insider’s” view point (a very difficult task), the academic study of religion perspective seeks to interpret that perspective by using comparative categories and themes that appear to be common to most religions. An example of such comparisons is found in the course text. Here the various religions we will study are divided into three basic categories: Myth/History; Worlds of Meaning; and, Ritual and the Good Life. The overall goal of this approach is to seek to understand a particular religion in a way that is both fair to its believers and relevant to the students’ own worldview(s).

The second approach we will employ, **phenomenology** refers to particular concern with certain aspects of a given religion. It helps us limit our circle of study to the phenomena of religion — the things humans produce, do, or experience when they are being religious. In particular, we will be looking at the belief systems by which religious people construct a coherent understanding of the world; the rituals and art by which they express the meaning and significance of life; the social structures by which they organize life; and the paths of life by which they express the values they hold. The overall goal of this approach is to provide additional categories of interpretation and to see how the various “parts” of a religion fit together into a relatively coherent “whole.”

The *definition of religion* we will use is explained in detail in the introductory section of the text. In brief, it emphasizes the human relationship with the *transcendent* — that which humans take to be sacred — and the path devotee’s walk towards *ultimate transformation* — that which brings the devotee’s “*world as envisioned*” into harmony with their “*world as experienced*.” Thus, our focus will be on the way in which the phenomena of a given religion (i.e., Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) brings its believers into an encounter with the sacred, helps them define and experience the ideal world of sacred existence, and brings them more closely into that ideal world. We will call this the **pilgrim’s path to the sacred life**. The emphasis, then, will be placed on the degree to which students are able to define that path, understand its direction and construction, and explain how a “pilgrim” within that tradition reaches the goal or ultimate end of the sacred life — from the perspective of the pilgrim!

### **Course Central Questions:**

Students will refer to pages 10-11 of *The Sacred Paths of the East*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, for an expanded discussion of the central course questions. In short, these questions are:

1. Who are we? Questions of Identity
2. What is important? Questions of Meaning and Significance
3. How should we live? Questions of Action and Value

These three questions will provide the basis for class discussion and for your comparison paper described below.

### **Course Objectives:**

- Students will demonstrate flexibility in thinking by examining religious traditions and worldviews based on assumptions that differ substantially from Western frameworks.
- Students will demonstrate curiosity by engaging in both the reading and interactive class lectures through the three central questions of the course.
- Students will demonstrate engagement by raising clarifying and substantive questioning based on the assigned readings and class lectures.
- Students will demonstrate mastery of essential vocabulary through assessment techniques
- Students will take ownership for the class by deciding on an assessment format.

### **Course Texts:**

- E Thomas Lawson, *Religions of Africa: Traditions in Transformation*, (Prospect Park, IL: Waveland Press), 1985
- Theodore Ludwig, *Sacred Paths of the East*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice-Hall), 2006.

### **Course Requirements:**

- Students will prepare for three assessments – one for each of the three major sections of the course. The assessments will consist of two parts: A take-home question that should be 250 to 500 words that will be due at the beginning of the class on which assessments are scheduled; A team-oriented jeopardy game which will be conducted in class on the announced assessment days. The jeopardy game will account for 1/3 of the exam (33%) with the take-home essay counting for 2/3s (67%) of the exam. Students who do not make active contributions to their team for the jeopardy game will receive no points for that part of the exam.
- Students will submit a 1250 - 1750 word (5-7 pages according to specifications) comparison paper that focuses on one of the three major sections of the course and compares the traditions within that section using one of the three central questions of the course. The paper is due Monday, April 16<sup>th</sup> at the beginning of class. Late papers will not be accepted after the beginning of class on the last Monday of the regular semester – Monday, April 16<sup>th</sup>. Term paper specifications will be posted on Sakai.
- Students will demonstrate their reading mastery of the text by asking clarifying and substantive questions during class sessions. A rubric for class participation is included at the end of the syllabus.

### **Grade Compilation:**

The final semester grade will be determined by student performance on formal in-class assessment, class participation, and the comparison paper. Each in-class assessment will account for twenty-percent of the final grade, class participation will account for twenty-percent of the final grade, and the comparison paper will account for twenty-percent of the final grade.

**Office Hours:**

The instructor maintains regular office hours. If you are having trouble in the class or would like to explore questions relevant to the course, you are strongly encouraged to drop by the instructor's office. Since other responsibilities occasionally may require the instructor's attention during those hours, students are encouraged to check with the instructor if a consultation is desired. If the announced hours conflict with your class schedule, please make an appointment with the instructor at a time which is mutually convenient.

**Disabilities:**

If you have a documented disability, you may qualify for specific academic services. Speak with Carol Tapp or with any of the Academic Services staff in the Caine Student Center, extension 4413. Documentation of the disability is required.

**Class Schedule:**

Readings for class should be completed prior to the class for which the reading is assigned. Readings designated "RTA" are from the book on African religions and stand for "Religious Traditions of Africa." Readings designated "SP" are from *The Sacred Paths of the East*. The readings are short but demand study time to familiarize yourself with the concepts and terminology which will be used in class. Students should also prepare questions prior to class. Note that the date and time of the final assessment during finals week is listed at the end of the syllabus. Student will need to make their travel arrangements accordingly. There will be no exceptions made for the final assessment schedule.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>
<b>Introductory Matters</b>		
Jan. 8	Introduction to the Course	
<b>African Religions</b>		
10	General Introduction	RTA 3-11
12	Zulu	RTA 12-49
17	Yoruba	RTA 50-81
19	Systems	RTA 81-99
22	Film: Zulu Zion	
24	Assessment	
<b>Religions of the Samsaric Cycle</b>		
<b>Hinduism</b>		
26	Film: 330 Million Gods	
29	Sacred Story/History – I	SP 35-47
31	Sacred Story/History – II	SP 47-56
Feb. 2	Worlds of Meaning – I	SP 57-66
5	Worlds of Meaning – II	SP 66-72
7	Ritual	SP 74-83
9	Good Life	SP 83-92
<b>Buddhism</b>		
12	Film: Footprints of the Buddha	
14	Sacred Story/History – I	SP 93-99
16	Sacred Story/History – II	SP 99-109
19	Worlds of Meaning – I	SP 110-118

21	Worlds of Meaning – II	SP 118-123
23	Ritual	SP 124-132
Mar. 5	Good Life	SP 132-140

#### **Other Samsaric Traditions**

7	Jainism	SP 142-153
9	Sikhism	SP 153-169
12	Samsaric Assessment	

### **Religions of Harmony**

#### **Religions of China**

14	Film: A Question of Balance	
16	Sacred Story/History – I	SP 170-179
19	Sacred Story/History – II	SP 179-185
21	Sacred Story/History – III	SP 188-197
23	Worlds of Meaning – I	SP 198-204
26	Worlds of Meaning – II	SP 204-210
28	Worlds of Meaning – III	SP 210-218
30	Ritual	SP 219-232
Apr. 2	Good Life	SP 232-241

#### **Religions of Japan**

4	Film: The Disappearing Buddha	
9	Sacred Story/History – I	SP 244-250
11	Sacred Story/History – II	SP 250-258
13	Worlds of Meaning – I	SP 259-265
16	Worlds of Meaning – II	SP 265-269
18	Ritual	SP 270-280
20	Good Life	SP 280-294

24	<b>Final Assessment</b> 9 o'clock sec.	8:30-10:30
27	<b>Final Assessment</b> 10 o'clock sec.	8:30-10:30

#### **Guidelines for Class Participation:**

The following rubric is for information purposes. It is the responsibility of the student to make sure that you are properly credited for your participation.

Questions may be asked by e-mail or in class. E-mail questions must be RECEIVED by the instructor by 8:00 am on the day the class is scheduled. Any questions received after that will not be counted.

Sixteen points will be needed for an A in class participation. Each time a clarifying or informational question is asked in class or submitted via e-mail a student will receive 1 point. Each time a substantive question is asked in class or submitted via e-mail a student will receive 2 points. The awarding of points is completely at the discretion of the instructor. A guideline for framing clarifying, informational, and substantive questions and questioning strategy can be found at: <http://www.adrian.edu/~fdetwiler/local/ctwg/questioning.htm>