Interpreting Asian Religions (REL 6319)

World Religions: Idea, Display, Institution

Fall 2012

Thursday periods 9-11 (4:05 – 7:05pm)

CBD (Classroom Building) 230

Instructor: Travis L. Smith (tlsmith@ufl.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:30am – 12:30pm, and by appointment (008 Anderson Hall)

Course Description

This graduate-level seminar will explore the origins, deployments and legacies of the concept of “World Religions.”

The story of World Religions effectively begins with the Orientalist scholarship emerging from European encounters with Asian peoples and cultures during the eras of missionary, and then colonial, expansion. In this “Oriental Renaissance” of the late-18th and 19th centuries, ancient monuments were exhumed, exotic languages were deciphered, and sacred texts were “discovered” and translated, and these adventurous scholarly enterprises heralded a new era of knowledge and discovery. New academic vistas were opened in the physical and now human sciences, linking the far-flung cultures of the world in a way that had never been done before. But these intercultural connections were also conditioned by colonialist fantasies and phobias, which were projected onto “othered” colonized subjects.

In America, the World Parliament of Religions, a prominent feature of Chicago’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, symbolized upstart America’s becoming a major player in the international economic scene, even as her rapidly expanding cities were becoming choked and overrun with slums. Both the Exposition and the Parliament were great theater, and the universalistic discourse and rosy projections for future salvific religious knowledge dazzled even the soberest of scholars of the day. The Parliament may also be thought of as marking the moment when the academic project of the comparative religions entered the popular realm.

We will explore the shifting paradigms of this era and attempt to understand the crucial role that religion has played in academic discourse and popular consciousness since the very inception of world religions paradigm. This course will also encourage discussion and reflection on how the Orientalist history of the study of religion affects our academic endeavors today.
Required Texts

We will read the following four texts in their entirety, or nearly so. They are available for purchase at local booksellers.


The following texts are recommended and should be available at local booksellers. We will be reading several chapters from these works:


In addition, we will be reading about half of Raymond Schwab’s landmark study, now out of print. If you can find a copy for a reasonable price, by all means get it! Otherwise, plan on reading lots of pages of this online or printed out:


Supplementary Readings

In addition to these titles, we will read selections from other books that will be cited in the schedule of readings, below. All of these additional readings will be available on the Sakai course website under the Resources tab.
Course Requirements and Evaluation

1. Regular attendance and active presence in class. The foundation of this course is discussion, and thus regular attendance is crucial. With our once-weekly schedule, each class meeting represents a substantial percentage of our class time, so each student is expected to be present at every class, fully prepared to discuss the materials.

2. Weekly written responses to the course material. Each member of the course must prepare a brief (1-2-page), carefully edited response to the week’s readings and post it to the discussion board of the Sakai website for the course. This response is due on TUESDAY midnight: this deadline is important, as it allows for the discussion leader (see below) to incorporate the responses into his or her presentation in time for our Thursday afternoon meeting.

3. Each class will be led by one member of the course, with the schedule to be determined during our first meeting. The discussion leader will first present an overview of materials (10-15 mins), and should have prepared a series of discussion questions and prompts that will stimulate class discussion. The discussion leader is exempted from the weekly response, but is expected to incorporate the other students’ responses into the class discussion.

4. A final paper of approximately 20-25 double-spaced pages. As this paper is expected to contribute to your ongoing research interests, the topic is open-ended; still the paper should be demonstrably relevant to the themes of the course. A paper topic and abstract should be determined, in consultation with the instructor, as early as possible in the semester. The final paper will be due on Friday, December 7.

5. A research presentation, which in most cases will be a streamlined, presentation-worthy version of the final paper, at a departmental colloquium to which our departmental colleagues will be invited. The schedule and format of this colloquium will be finalized during the course of the semester, but will likely take place in November or early December. This presentation will allow you to solicit comments from your colleagues that can be incorporated into the final paper.

Students will be evaluated on the following basis:

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<td>Weekly Responses</td>
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<td>Discussion Leading</td>
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<td>Research Presentation</td>
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<td>Final Paper</td>
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Grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

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In addition, please familiarize yourself with the official UF policies on how grade points are assigned:
Grades and Grading Policies

Academic Honesty

Students must conform to UF’s academic honesty policy regarding plagiarism and other forms of cheating. This means that on all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The university specifically prohibits cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, bribery, conspiracy, and fabrication. For more information about the definition of these terms and other aspects of the Honesty Guidelines, see http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/conductcode.php and http://www.chem.ufl.edu/~itl/honor.html.

All students found to have cheated, plagiarized, or otherwise violated the Honor Code in any assignment for this course will be prosecuted to the full extent of the university honor policy, including judicial action and the sanctions listed in paragraph XI of the Student Conduct Code. For serious violations, you will fail this course.

Students with Disabilities

Please do not hesitate to ask for accommodation for a documented disability. Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. Please ask the instructor if you would like any assistance in this process.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1 – August 23, 2012

Introduction to the course: NO READING

Week 2 – August 30 Asia in Europe: the Oriental Renaissance

Halbfass, ch. 1-5 (pp. 2-83)
Schwab, ch. 1-5 (pp. 1-128)


Halbfass, ch. 6-9 (pp. 84-159)
Masuzawa Ch. 7 (207-256)


M. Winternitz, *A General Index to the Names and Subject-Matter of the Sacred Books of the East* [constituting volume 50 of the SBE], introductory materials (including a preface by A. A. Macdonell, an introduction by Winternitz, and a list of the 49 volumes of the SBE), pp. vi-xvi.

### Week 4 – September 13
*India and Europe: Concepts, Lenses, Perspectives*

Halbfass Ch. 11-20 (pp. 172-375)

### Week 5 – September 20
*The Mutual Construction of Britain and India*

Van der Veer, entire

### Week 6 – September 27
*The Colonial Invention of Hinduism and Buddhism?*


Masuzawa, ch. 4 (121-146)

### Week 7 – October 4
*Hinduism Invented: Another Perspective*


### Week 8 – October 11
*Colonial Exhibition-ism*


Burris, intro, ch. 1-3 (xiii-xxi, 1-85).

Hoffenberg, Peter F., *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley, UC Press, 2001), ch. 1, “Exhibitions and the New Imperialism” (pp. 1-30). *available as an e-Book*

**Week 9 – October 18 American Protestantism and the World Parliament of Religions, 1893**

Burris, ch. 4-end (86-178).


Ziolkowski, chapters by Marty (165-170), Kitagawa (171-190), Seager (191-218)


**Week 10 – October 25 Vivekananda in America and “the Universal Religion”**


**Week 11 – November 1 Comparing Religions, Comparative Religion, World Religions**

Masuzawa, “Preface,” “Introduction” and chs. 1-2 (pp. ix-xv, 1-104)


**Week 12 – November 8 World Religions, History and Ideology of an Idea**

Masuzawa, ch. 3, 5-6, 8-9 (107-120, 147-206, 259-328)

**Week 13 – November 15** Asian Religions and Nationalist Politics into the 20th century


Abstract for final paper due Monday, November 12

**Week 14 – November 22**

NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

**Week 15 – November 29** Student Conference

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

*Papers to be submitted as attachments on this week’s discussion board*

**Friday, December 7, 5pm – Final Paper Due.** Please place a hard copy in my mailbox in the department office.