

# INTERPRETING ASIAN RELIGIONS (RLG 6319/03FC)

Prof. Mario Poceski (Univ. of Florida) | Spring 2015



## Class Time & Location

Fri, periods 8-10 (3:00–6:00 pm); AND 101

## Office Hours & Contact Information

Fri, 1:00–2:40 pm, and by appointment (1/9–4/17); 132 Anderson Hall; (352) 273-2937;  
[mpoceski@ufl.edu](mailto:mpoceski@ufl.edu); [www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/mpoceski).

## Course Description

The graduate seminar serves as a comprehensive historical survey of the Western reception, experience, and interpretation of Asian religions, as well as Asian responses to the encounter with the West. It also explores the development of major theoretical paradigms and methodological approaches in the academic study of major Asian religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. This is one of the core courses in the Asian religions track of the graduate program in religion.

## Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites, although prior knowledge of Buddhism, Hinduism, or other Asian religions will be very helpful. No knowledge of Asian languages is required.

## Format

The seminar is organized around class discussions based on the assigned weekly readings. Each week, the students will rotate the responsibility of making presentations and leading discussions of the assigned readings. Students are required to come to each class prepared to engage in critical analysis and discussion of the relevant materials.

## Requirements

- Reading of assigned materials, class attendance, and participation in discussions (20% of the final grade).
- Class presentations, reading responses, and leading of discussions (10%).
- Film review (10%), due by 3/13 (1 pm).
- Paper abstract and annotated bibliography (10%), due by 3/27 (1 pm).
- Research paper (50%), due by 4/24 (1 pm).

## Discussion Topics and Course Schedule

- JAN** W 1 **Introduction**  
W 2 **European Experiences and Perceptions of India**  
| Pennington 3-22, 167-190; Weber 3-54; Burris xiii-xxi, 167-178  
W 3 **Max Müller, Sanskrit, and the Science of Religion**  
| Stone 1-23, 43-80, 353-356; Masuzawa 58-75  
W 4 **European Philosophers' Interpretations of Buddhism I**  
| Droit 1-72
- FEB** W 5 **European Philosophers' Interpretations of Buddhism II**  
| Droit 75-168  
W 6 **East/West Encounter at the Parliament of Religions I**  
| Seager xiii-xli, 1-93  
W 7 **East/West Encounter at the Parliament of Religions II**  
| Seager 94-175  
W 8 **Film:** TBA (*Mr. and Mrs. Iyer; Train to Pakistan; The Funeral*)
- MAR** W 9 **Spring Break**  
W 10 **Postcolonial Theory and the Construction of Hinduism I**  
| King 1-117  
W 11 **Postcolonial Theory and the Construction of Hinduism II**  
| King 118-218  
W 12 **Theorizing and Defining Hinduism**  
| Flood 1-64; Llewellyn: 1-13, 171-202.
- APR** W 13 **Japanese Invention of Religion I**  
| Josephson 1-42, 71-131  
W 14 **Japanese Invention of Religion II**  
| Josephson 164-262  
W 15 **Student presentations**



## Required Books

- Droit, Roger-Pol. *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha*. Translated by David Streight and Pamela Vohnson. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Josephson, Jason Ānanda. *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East'*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Seager, Richard Hughes. *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

## Additional Required Readings

- Burris, John P. *Exhibiting Religion: Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions, 1851-1893*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001: xiii-xxi, 167-178.<sup>1</sup>
- Flood, Gavin, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003: 1-64.
- Llewellyn, J. E., ed. *Defining Hinduism: A Reader*. London: Equinox, 2005: 1-13, 171-202.
- Masuzawa, Tomoko. *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993: 58-75.
- Pennington, Brian K. *Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and Colonial Construction of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005: 3-22, 167-190.
- Stone, Jon R., ed. *The Essential Max Müller: On Language, Mythology, and Religion*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002: 1-23, 43-80, 353-356.
- Weber, Max. *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1958: 3-54.

## Recommended Readings

- Gellner, David N., and Max Weber. *The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism: Weberian Themes*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Halbfass, Wilhelm. *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1988.
- King, Richard. "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism.'" *Numen* 46.2 (1999): 146-85.
- Lopez, Donald S., ed. *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Macfie, A. L. *Orientalism: A Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Schwab, Raymond. *Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- Snodgrass, Judith. *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Tweed, Thomas A. *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Weber, Max, Hans Heinrich Gerth, and C. Wright Mills. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, Galaxy, 1958 (republished by Routledge, 2009).
- Weber, Max. *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1964.



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<sup>1</sup> The additional readings will be distributed via eLearning.

## Online e-Learning System

- The syllabus and other course materials are posted online via UF's e-Learning system, using Sakai.
- Students should not write to the instructor by using the email feature in e-Learning; instead, they should send written communications directly on the email address given above.

## Grading

- The final grade will be based on each student's individual performance and his/her fulfillment of the course requirements, as stipulated in the syllabus.
- The same course rules and expectations apply equally to all students—no student is entitled to special consideration or unique treatment. Other extraneous or irrelevant factors, including student's personal desires or expectations about grades, will not be taken into account. Students should also not expect retroactive changes or other dubious forms of grade modification.
- Students should take all assignments and other course requirements very seriously. There will be no opportunities to do additional work for extra credit or better grade.
- No incomplete grades will be given, except in very exceptional circumstances, in which case the students should contact the instructor no later than a week before the last day of classes.
- Final grades will be computed on this scale: A = 100–93%; A- = 93.9–90%; B+ = 89.9–87%; B = 86.9–83%; B- = 82.9–80% ; C+ = 79.9–77%; C = 76.9–73%; C- = 72.9–70%; D+ = 69.9–67%; D = 66.9–63%; D- = 62.9–60%; E = 59.9% or less.

## Attendance

- **Attendance** is **mandatory** for all students, starting with the first day of classes. Students who have problems with class attendance or punctuality should think twice before enrolling in this course.
- Active and informed **participation** in classroom discussions is expected from all students. In order to facilitate that, students are expected to read carefully all assigned readings before coming to class.
- **Absences** from class will have adverse effect on the final grade. After missing one (1) hour of instruction (unexcused), each subsequent unexcused hour will lead to an automatic 1% **reduction** of the final grade; there is no limit to this kind of grade deduction (i.e. student can fail the course due to a poor attendance record).
- Valid excuses for missed classes must be submitted *in writing* and in a timely manner, along with pertinent documentation (such as note from a doctor).
- Written excuses for planned absences—participation in athletic meetings or religious observances, for example—must be submitted in advance.
- Coming late, leaving early, being inattentive, and other forms of disruptive behavior can be counted as unexcused absences.

## Written Assignments

- When students are responsible for leading weekly discussion, they have to prepare a 400-500 word **summary and response** to the assigned reading(s). The reading response must be posted on e-Learning by 1 pm on Friday (the day of the pertinent class discussion). It should contain a brief summary of the relevant reading(s), student's critical response, and several topics for class discussion.
- The **abstract** and **bibliography** must clearly state the topic—and provide provisional title—of the final paper. It should contain a short—250 to 300 words—abstract of the paper and at least 15 titles of academic publications pertinent to the student's research topic, each of them annotated with a short summary of contents and a note on how it is relevant to the stated topic.
- Students need to write an informative, thoughtful, and nuanced **review** of the film shown in class. The review should describe the film as well as offer a critical assessment and analysis of it, especially as it pertains to its depiction or treatment of religion. Expected length is 1,000 words.
- The **final paper** should be 7,000-8,000 words, inclusive of notes and citations. There should be a bibliography at the end of the paper.
- Students are welcome to bring early drafts of their papers and ask for feedback/advice, but they have to do that in person during office hours.
- All written assignments must be submitted in **MS Word** and must follow standard academic format. Use standard font, such as Calibri 12, for all assignments, with 1.5 spacing and 1" margins. Do not forget to include paper title, course name, instructor name, date, and page numbers.
- Each written assignment must be **submitted digitally**, via e-Learning, before the final deadline.
- **No late submissions** will be accepted under any circumstances.
- Students are encouraged to avoid procrastination and make early submissions, at least a week before the final deadline.

## Classroom Conduct

- All students are required to come to class on time, as late arrivals (and early departures) are very disruptive.
- Students are expected to be courteous and respectful, and abstain from disruptive behavior in the classroom that adversely affects others and is contrary to the pursuit of knowledge. Examples of such behavior include talking with someone, displaying active disinterest in the class (e.g. sleeping or inappropriate computer use), or putting down others. Phones should also be turned off during class. Offending students will be asked to leave.
- It is hoped that there will be lively debates and informed discussions. While there is room for individual opinions and disagreements, they have to be expressed in ways that are appropriate for an academic setting.

## Office Hours and Communication

- Students are encouraged to come to office hours, especially if they have questions or need help with the course materials. The instructor will also be glad to discuss all relevant topics that, due to time constraints, are not covered in class in much detail.
- Any questions about the course requirements or any aspect of the coursework should be resolved by consulting the instructor directly and in person, preferably during office hours. Pleading ignorance or lack of common sense are not valid excuses for failures to fulfill requirements or abide by course policies.

## Extracurricular

- The assigned readings and other seminar requirements, as described in this syllabus, are a basic minimum. Students are encouraged to take personal initiative to further broaden their knowledge and improve their academic skills by doing additional readings, including materials written in classical or foreign languages.

## Plagiarism and Cheating

- Plagiarism and cheating will result in a failing grade and other serious penalties.
- For more information, see the “Academic Honesty—Student Guide” brochure (posted online by the Dean of Students Office).

## Disability

- A student who has a documented disability that may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements should consult the instructor in person at the beginning of the course so that appropriate arrangements may be made.
- The student is responsible for communicating his/her needs to the instructor, as early as possible. All arrangements for changes pertaining to the exams must be made at least one week in advance.

## Other Notices

- Registration in the course implies that each student enters a contractual agreement with the instructor, whereas he/she is accountable for fulfilling all course requirements and adhering to the course policies.
- Students are responsible for knowing and following all schedules and instructions contained in this syllabus, as well as any other instructions given in class (remember, attendance is not optional).

