

East Asian Religions

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Comes from the experience of teaching within the Graduate Theological Union, a consorial program in graduate theological and religious studies in Berkeley, California; an entry-level graduate course, taught as a 3 hours/week (36 hours/term) seminar; and enrolled approximately 10 students.

This is a straightforwardly-designed survey of themes in traditional Chinese, Korean, and Japanese religions, with a special emphasis on 6 key themes: ancestors, self-cultivation, festival, sagehood, religion-state relations, and religion and food. Because it is taught for theological students, it includes theological as well as historical and anthropological questions and concerns, and also makes room for the exploration of East Asian Christian movements as well as Asian-American religious expressions, including Christian ones. Essential to the course's design is the assumption that neither a blow-by-blow historical survey nor a "tradition per week" survey will adequately convey the richness and inter-relatedness of these religious cultures -- hence the focus on theme, rather than chronology or "tradition." Historical and cultural backgrounds are provided, however, in weekly lectures which preface the completion of assigned readings.

Course description

Each of the two Chinese characters provided above (with Chinese, Korean, and Japanese pronunciations given beneath each character) are used, in various ways, to translate the Western concept of "religion." One of our goals in this course is to absorb what these characters, and the concepts they represent, might mean in themselves.

Through primary (in translation) and secondary texts, videos, field trips, and seminar discussions, we will introduce ourselves to the rich, living treasures of the East Asian spiritual heritage in China, Korea, and Japan (Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, Shinto, folk, etc.) -- its past, as well as its present and future. We will also give some of our time to the consideration of Christianity as an East Asian religion, and to the situations of East Asian religions in North America. Historical, sociological, anthropological, and theological questions all will play a part in our common exploration.

- No background in East Asian languages, history, or religions required
- Can be used to fulfill CDSP M.Div. Multicultural Requirement -- ask!
- All M.A. and M.Div. students welcome
- All assigned readings in course reader (2 copies on GTU Library reserve)

Course requirements

- assigned **readings** and **discussion** participation (*weekly, in class*)
- short e-mail **journal entries** in response to readings (*weekly, by 9 a.m. Thursday*)
- one short (3-5 pp.) **research prospectus** (*due 4 November*)
- one longer (15-20 pp.) **research paper** (*due 16 December*)

Course calendar

Week One (9 September) **INTRODUCTION TO EAST ASIAN CULTURES**

(no preparation required)

Introductory comments on history, geography & languages of East Asian cultures

Week Two (16 September) **VENERATING THE ANCESTORS**

How ought human beings to honor their dead? What is the role of ancestor veneration in traditional East Asian religious cultures? How should Christians interpret their own participation in such rituals?

Laurence G. Thompson, "Family Religion," in *The Chinese Way in Religion*, pp. 155-169

Laurel Kendall, "Korean Ancestors: From the Woman's Side," in *Korean Women*, pp. 97-112

John M. Takeda, "The Spirits of the Dead: Christianity, Buddhism and Traditional Belief in Japan," *Anglican Theological Review* 79/1 (Winter 1997): 27-37

Excerpts from film, *The Funeral* (Japan; Juzo Itami, director; 1984) -- IN CLASS --

Week Three (23 September) **CULTIVATING THE SELF**

How have various East Asian religious traditions understood the self and its potential for spiritual development? What distinctive paths for self-cultivation are offered by these traditions? What might Christians learn from them?

"The Great Learning," in Chan, *Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 84-87

Chang Tsai, "The Western Inscription," in Chan, *Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 497-498

"Zen Buddhism" and "Dôgen: Conversations," in Tsunoda, *et al*, *Sources of Japanese Tradition I*, pp. 226-235, 240-249

Suzanne Cahill, "Practice Makes Perfect: Paths to Transcendence for Women in Medieval China," *Taoist Resources* 2/2 (1990): 23-42

Brian Wilson, "The Korean Shaman," in Kendall & Peterson, *Korean Women*, pp. 113-128

Week Four (30 September) **RITUAL AND FESTIVAL**

How is religion "done" in East Asian cultures? What do people expect in return for their religious actions? How do different religious rites and celebrations fit into one's life? Is any of this familiar to us?

Kristofer Schipper, "Everyday Religion," in *The Taoist Body*, pp. 20-31

Ian Reader, "Turning to the Gods in Times of Trouble," in *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 1-22

J. H. Grayson, "*Musok-kyo*: Folk Religion in Modern Society," in *Korea: A Religious History*, pp. 255-269

Excerpts from video on traditional Korean music and ritual -- IN CLASS --

Week Five (7 October) **SAGEHOOD AND SALVATION**

What models of sanctity, sageliness, or virtue exist in traditional East Asian religious cultures? Have men and women had different options for becoming "holy," "wise," or "righteous"? Can these be compared with Christian traditions?

Jung Young Lee, "Shamanism & Sexual Repression," in *Korean Shamanistic Rituals*, pp. 167-185

Livia Kohn, "Immortal Personality," in *The Taoist Experience*, pp. 279-302

Laurence G. Thompson, "Most Holy Former Master, the Philosopher K'ung," in *The Chinese Way in Religion*, pp. 139-143

Miriam L. Levering, "The Dragon Girl and the Abbess of Mo-Shan," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5/1: 19-35

"Amida and the Pure Land," in Tsunoda, *et al*, *Sources of Japanese Tradition I*, pp. 184-212

Week Six (14 October) **SPIRITUALITY AND THE STATE**

What kinds of relationships have existed between the state and religious institutions in East Asian religious cultures? Is there a positive role for the state in religious life, and *vice versa*? How should Christians (especially Anglicans) feel about these relationships?

"The Dynastic Mandate" and Wu-tsung, "Edict on the Suppression of Buddhism," in de Bary, *et al*, *Sources of Chinese Tradition I*, pp. 174-183, 379-382

"Early Shintô" and "Shintô in Medieval Japan," in Tsunoda, *et al*, *Sources of Japanese Tradition I*, pp. 21-24, 261-276

Helen Hardacre, "Religious Freedom Under State Shintô," in *Shintô & The State*, pp. 114-132

Tyler Hendricks, "Some Factors Involved in the Early Rootage & Flourishing of Protestant Christianity in Korea," in Flinn & Hendricks, *Religion in the Pacific Era*, pp. 63-77

Week Seven (21 October) **RELIGION AND FOOD (prospectus DUE)**

What parts are played by food and drink in East Asian religious cultures? Who cooks? Who eats? Who drinks? Where? When? Why?

Jordan Paper, "Food in Chinese Culture," in *The Spirits Are Drunk*, pp. 40-50

Eisai, "Drink Tea & Prolong Life," in Tsunoda, *et al*, *Sources of Japanese Tradition I*, pp. 237-240

Livia Kohn, "Drugs and Diets," *The Taoist Experience*, pp. 148-153

Ch'en Ts'ao-An, *poems & commentary*, in Seaton, *The Wine of Endless Life*, pp. 29-33, 53-56

Excerpts from film, *Eat Drink Man Woman* (Taiwan; Ang Lee, director; 1994) -- IN CLASS --

28 OCTOBER: NO CLASS -- FALL BREAK

Week Eight (4 November) **"NEW" EAST ASIAN RELIGIONS: JAPAN**

What is "new" about so-called "new religions" such as Tenrikyô? What is their relationship to "old" religions? What is their role outside of East Asia?

Helen Hardacre, "The World View of the New Religions," in *Kurozumikyô and the New Religions of Japan*, pp. 3-27

H. Byron Earhart, "The New Religions," in *Religion in the Japanese Experience: Sources and Interpretations*, pp. 237-255

Thora E. Chinnery, *Religious Conflict and Compromise in a Japanese Village*, pp. 5-23

Excerpts from *Ofudesaki*

Video, *Tenrikyô: The Teachings for the Joyous Life* + GUEST SPEAKER -- IN CLASS --

Week Nine (11 November) **EAST ASIAN RELIGIONS IN AMERICA**

How have East Asian religious practices and institutions been affected by their introduction to North America -- and vice versa? How do Western converts to these religions negotiate the "Asian-ness" of their newfound religious commitments? How do Christians of East Asian descent negotiate their religiously-plural backgrounds and communities?

Rick Fields, "The Other Zen & The Pure Land," in *How The Swans Came to the Lake*, pp. 339-358

Victor Sogen Hori, "Sweet-and-Sour Buddhism," *Tricycle* (Fall 1994), pp. 48-52

Amy Tan, "Grand Auntie Du's Funeral" (Tweed & Prothero, *Asian Religions in America*, pp. 357-360)

Rudy V. Busto, "The Gospel According to the Model Minority?" (*Amerasia Journal* 22/1 [1996]: 133-147)

Excerpts from film, *My America* (USA; Renee Tajima-Peña, director; 1997) -- IN CLASS --

Week Ten (16 November) **FIELD TRIP #1: Berkeley Buddhist Monastery**

Week Ten (18 November) **FIELD TRIP #2: Church of Our Saviour, Oakland**

25 NOVEMBER: NO CLASS -- THANKSGIVING

Week Eleven (2 December) **EAST ASIAN RELIGIOUS CULTURES TODAY**

How does the contemporary East Asian religious landscape resemble/differ from the traditional patterns we have seen thus far? What is the relationship between traditional and new religious movements? Where do Christian communities fit into this mosaic?

Edward W. J. Chung, "Confucianism & Women in Modern Korea," *Annual Review of Women in World Religions* III, pp. 142-188

Spencer J. Palmer, "The New Religions of Korea: Introduction," *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 43 (1967), pp. 1-8

Ian Reader, "Spirits, Satellites, and a User-Friendly Religion," in *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 194-233

Philip L. Wickeri, "The Church in China on the Eve of the 21st Century" (WCC document)

Week Twelve (9 December) **PRESENTATIONS OF STUDENT RESEARCH**

Week Thirteen (16 December) **WRAP-UP (paper DUE)**