

**Government of Russian federation**

**"National Research University  
Higher School of Economics  
Faculty of World Economics and International Affairs**

**School of Asian Studies**

**Bachelor's Program in Asian and African Studies  
Course**

**“Religious and philosophical thought in Asia”**

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## **Religious and philosophical thought in Asia**

### **1. Overview of the course**

This course provides an introduction to the study of the history, major teachings, and practices of the major East Asian and Middle East religions and spiritual practices and is designed to give conceptual tools to appreciate diverse religious practice in East. It covers the development of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Islam, Hindu, Jaina and wide range of popular and local religions. From historical perspective we will also explore the development of key theological, religious and philosophical doctrines as well as associated practices. An effort will be made to spend time on each tradition according to its importance to Asia as a whole. Buddhism and Islam will thus receive the most attention as it is the only pan-Asian religion.

We will explore the role of religions in politics and social relations in East and South, South East Asia and Middle East, and will analyze the origins, central teachings, divisions and branches, rituals and practices, influences on culture, and responses to modern challenges for each tradition

The emphasis throughout the course is on the hermeneutic difficulties attendant upon the study of religion in general, and Asian religions in particular. We will explore new Asian religions as dynamic, ongoing forces in the lives of individuals and in the collective experience of modern societies.

### **2. Rational**

This course offers anthropological approach to the study of religion across this dynamic region. This course is not a comprehensive survey, but is designed around major conceptual themes, such as ritual, image veneration, mysticism, meditation, death, and category formation in the study of religion.

The course also is designed to provide students with conceptual tools to appreciate diverse Asian religious practices in comparative terms, to review and appreciate the key anthropological debates and influential works on the study of local religions, and to introduce students to ethnographic approaches for researching and writing about religion and society in Asia.

### **3. Learning Objectives and outcome**

Upon the completion of this course, students should

- understand the origins of the religious and philosophical thought in Asia, its peculiarities and main schools;
- know the main concepts and approaches to Asian religions and to use it as an umbrella concept for the studies of religious traditions;
- to understand the connection between religions, culture and social life in Asia;
- to be able to identify main religious schools, their leaders, concepts, key term, believes and rituals;  
trace the historical development of the religious tradition in Asia from its very beginning to the present day, its role in social, political and cultural life of the society;
- outline the various rituals (calendrical and lifecycle) within temples and homes as well as the importance of the performing arts;
- identify recent developments within the Asian religions tradition in response to changes in technology that affect globalization, diaspora communities, the environment, and reproduction;

- obtain critical insight in the various ways in which the religions and philosophical schools influence societies and politics both in India, China, Japan, Korea, Middle East
- to gain in-depth knowledge of the textual sources for Asian religious traditions
- develop skills in critical reading of the commentaries and research literature on Asian religions and philosophies and in clearly formulating their own approaches and positions.

#### **4. Class Attendance & Discussion**

Regular class attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to attend class as well as participate in lectures, discussions, and review sessions. Class participation will constitute 25% of the final grade. Each student is allowed a maximum of two (2) and no more than two (2) unexcused absences during the semester. For each unexcused absence thereafter, five (5) points are deducted from your final grade. You are responsible for keeping the professor informed of any situation that prevents you from attending class. **Students who have more than 4 unexcused absences will not pass the course**

#### **5. Prerequisites**

There is no specific prerequisites for this course however it is desirable to go through courses such as «History of religions» or «Religious studies» with the general theory of world religions and beliefs, as well as «History of Asia»

Good knowledge of English.

#### **Tests and examination**

Students will have at least two sudden quizzes in classes as a multiple choice and one final exam in the form of written essay with two questions

#### **6. Grading**

Attendance and Class Participation - 25%

Tests (quiz) - 25%

Group Discussion and readings – 25%

Final Examination (essay) - 25 %

#### **7. Reading**

Main text book is:

Oxtoby, Willard G., Roy C. Amore, and Amir Hussain. World Religions: Eastern Traditions. 4th ed. Oxford University Press, 2014.

You can also refer to:

Hinnells, John R. The Penguin Handbook of the World's Living Religions. Ed. John R. Hinnells,. Penguin Books, 20 .

### Optional and additional reading

1. Adler, Joseph A. Chinese Religious Traditions. Pearson, 2002.
2. Breen, John, and Mark Teeuwen. A New History of Shinto. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
3. Esposito, John L., Darrell J. Fasching, and Todd T. Lewis. World Religions Today. 5th ed. Oxford University Press, 20
4. Gethin, Rupert. The Foundations of Buddhism. Oxford University Press, USA, 1
5. Haleem, Muhammad Abdel. Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style. I. B. Tauris, 2010.
6. Knott, Kim. Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2000.
7. Littlejohn, Ronnie. Confucianism: An Introduction. I.B.Tauris, 2010.
8. Littlejohn, Ronnie. Daoism: An Introduction. I. B. Tauris, 2009.
9. Lopez Jr., Donald S. Religions of China in Practice. Princeton University Press, 1996.
10. Ruthven, Malise. Islam: A Very Short Introduction. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2012.
11. Samuel, Geoffrey, and Jay Johnston. Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body. Ed. Geoffrey Samuel, and Jay Johnston. Routledge, 2013
12. Smith, Huston. The World's Religions. 5th ed. HarperOne, 200 .
13. Turner, Bryan S., and Oscar Salemink. Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia. Ed. Bryan S. Turner, and Oscar Salemink. Routledge, 20
14. Yang, Fenggang. Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule. Oxford University Press, 2011.

### 8. Schedule

		Lectures (hours)	Seminars and discussions (hours)	Reading (World Religions: Eastern Tradition, pp)
1	Introduction to the study of Asian religions	2	2	4-23
2	Indian Religions and Hindu Traditions	2		26- 96
3	Sikh Traditions: Origins, Teachings & Practices	2	2	106-142
4	Jaina Traditions	2		146-178
5	Islam in Asia	2	4	

6	Buddhist tradition teaching and development	4	2	187-257
7	Chinese religions	4	4	262-315
8	Japanese and Korean religious traditions	2	4	343-374 322-332
9	Asian Religion Religion in the Modern World	2	2	380-393

## 9. Classes

### Topic 1 Introduction to Asia and the study of Asian religions

Main concepts and approaches to Asian religions.

Between religion, philosophy and spirituality.

Basic characteristics of Asian religions

*Readings:*

World Religions ch. 1

### Topic 2. Indian Religions and Hindu traditions

Hinduism: From Pre-History to the Vedas

Origins. Vedas and Vedic Hymns. The Upanishads and central concepts in Hinduism. The Hindu Epics, the Bhagavad Gītā and bhakti (devotion). Classical Hinduism, Ramayana

Patanjali's Yoga Sūtra. Ideas of reincarnations and Path of Knowledge. The concept of Four Paths  
Hinduism and modernity

*Readings:*

World Religions ch. 2

*Additional:*

Knott, Kim. Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2000.

### Topic 3. Sikh tradition Origins, Teachings & Practices

Founding of the Sikh tradition in India. Guru Nanak and his successors.

The lineage of Gurus. The Khalsa, Sikh Doctrine . Four notions of Guruship

Sikh ethics. Practice , the annual festival cycles. Sikh reform movements

Sikhism in modern India and religious pluralism. Contemporary Sikh teachings and practices.

*Readings:*

World Religions ch. 3

**Topic 4 Jaina Traditions**

Origins of Jainism, the idea of renunciation of worldly bonds. «Right faith» (samyak darshan). The Shharama revolution. Early Sahngha and literature

Development of Jainism and its bifurcation into two stream, the Digambara and Svetambara traditions.

Cosmology, practice, asceticism

Reform movement of 20th century

*Readings:*

World Religions ch. 3

**Topic 5 Islam in Asia**

History of Islam: the nature of pre-Islamic society, culture, and religion; rise of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties in the Middle East; the Ottoman and Safavid empires, the rise of Islamic nationalism and the emergence of violent anti-Western sentiment. Revivalist reforms of 19 c. Modernist reform

Basic Doctrines of Islam. Doctrine 'God is One'. Five pillars of Islam The Nature and destiny of man. The Quran and the Prophet. Revelation

The Shari'a and its consequences

Basic practices and principles. Umma, Shahada, salat, sawm, zakat, Hajj

Islamic law

Women in traditional Islamic Practice

Struggle for Islamic identity. Transnational Islam in Asia

*Reading*

Ruthven, Malise. Islam: A Very Short Introduction. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2012.

Haleem, Muhammad Abdel. Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style. I. B. Tauris, 2010.

**Topic 6. Buddhist tradition**

Buddhism in India: The Buddha, the early sangha, Ashoka and the spread of Buddhism  
Eightfold Path and Four Noble truth, basic Buddhist concepts.

Main Buddhist schools Mahayana, Theravada, Vajrayana, Buddhism in Tibet.

Buddhist literature and Iconography . The concept of Gift of Knowledge.

Buddhism Across Asia and Silk Road. Buddhism in West. Buddhism in China and Japan.

Buddhist states in South-East Asia

Buddhist influence to social life, arts in Asia

Buddhist cultures across Silk Road

*Readings*

World Religions ch. 5

**Topic 7 Chinese religions**

Archaic beliefs and rituals in China. Spirits and ghosts.

Daoism in China. Religious and Philosophical Daoism. Spirits and ghosts, longevity and immortality. The

concept of «true men»

Popular religions and festivals. Solar and Lunar symbols

Buddhism in China. Chinese buddhist canon. Chan sect and culture. Buddhism and the state. Secret religious societies, sectarianism

Confucianism/ Confucius and his teachings. Analects. Main principles and behavior The religious, moral and political aspect of Confucianism/ Confucianism and East Asian culture today.

Religions in Modern China, Taiwan and Hong Kong

### *Reading*

World Religions Ch 6

### *Additional:*

Adler, Joseph A. Chinese Religious Traditions. Pearson, 2002.

Littlejohn, Ronnie. Confucianism: An Introduction. I.B.Tauris, 2010.

Lopez Jr., Donald S. Religions of China in Practice. Princeton University Press, 1996.

Littlejohn, Ronnie. Daoism: An Introduction. I. B. Tauris, 2009.

Yang, Fenggang. Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule. Oxford University Press, 2011.

## **Topic 8 Japanese and Korean Religious tradition**

Japanese Shinto: The Kami Way

Continuities in Religious practice, performing beliefs.

Mythology (Kojiki, Amaterasu)

Japanese Buddhism, Zen and Japanese Culture

Todaiji Tendai and Shingon

Pure Land Salvation, Rinzai Zen and Kamakura culture. Soto Zen, Nichiren

Rise and Fall of Christianity in Japan

Nationalism and Shinto. Postwar Restructuring and Religious adaptation

Old Joseon and divine ancestors.

Daosim and Shamanism in Korea .

Schools of Korean Buddhism. Confucian influence. Neo-Confucianism

Contemporary Confucianism in Korea

### *Reading*

World Religions ch 6 322-332

ch 7

### *Additional*

Breen, John, and Mark Teeuwen. A New History of Shinto. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

## **Topic 9 Asian Religion Religion in the Modern World**

Religious Revivals in Asia. Mega-churches

### *Readings*

World Religions chapter 8

## 10. Questions for self-control and discussion

1. What is the origin of the word "Hinduism" and how does this equate to the Sanskrit word "dharma"?
2. What was the standard view in the early twentieth century on the origins of Hinduism?
3. What are the titles of the different Vedas, their four sections, and an example of an Upanishad associated with each of the first three Vedas?
4. What four important concepts are introduced in the Upanishads and what do they mean?
5. What is the most famous section of the Mahabharata called and what does it teach?
6. What are the three Hindu ways to liberation?
7. What are the four stages of life and what is the major activity involved in each? Who was Shankara and what ideas did he contribute to the Indian spiritual dialogue?
8. What is tantra?
9. How is South Indian devotion different from North Indian devotion?
10. Who are the three gods of the Hindu trimurti and why is labelling the Hindu traditions "polytheistic" problematic?
11. How did the Arya Samaj movement reform aspects of the Hindu tradition? What was this in response to?
12. What is a naga? Where is its image found?
13. What are the key elements of a Hindu funeral rite? How are funerals related to a state of pollution?
14. How do the Vedas support some of the goals of artificial insemination? Overall, are Hindu texts sources for guidance in the use of modern reproductive technologies? Which religions contributed to the dynamic situation in Punjab in the fifteenth century? What mystical experience did Guru Nanak have and how did he understand his mission after this? Who was the fifth Guru and what did he accomplish?
15. What is the Khalsa?
16. What is the fundamental statement of Sikh belief?
17. In Sikhism, what is the value of human life?
18. What are the four notions of "Guru" in the Sikh tradition?
19. What is the Sikh sense of justice?
20. What are the five aspects of the morning liturgy for a Sikh?
21. What were the reasons for the Nirankari and Singh Sabha reform movements?
22. What did the wife of the second guru contribute to the Panth?
23. How has Sikh devotional literature continued to be relevant in modern Sikh writing today?
24. What was "Operation Blue Star"?
25. Why is religious pluralism not necessarily perceived as a threat to the Sikh tradition? What efforts has Balbir Singh Seechewal made in bringing awareness to environmental issues and how does he relate this to the Sikh tradition?
26. Jainas believe that ajiva and jiva have always been enmeshed with non-soul material being attracted to the soul. How is it that the soul of a human being is paradoxically dependent on non-soul matter in order to become free of it?
27. What are the Buddhist schools and vehicles and in what regions are they centralized?
28. How was Ganges Spirituality influential in the origins of Buddhism?
29. What are the various classes of "holy" people known in Buddhism?
30. What were the four sights that Siddhartha Gautama had and what did he do afterwards?
31. Where was the Buddha's first teaching given and what was it about?
32. In detail, what are the three characteristics of existence?
33. Who was Ashoka and why was he important?

34. Who was Nagarjuna and what did he contribute to Buddhism?
35. What are the two main sects of the Chan (Zen) school and what is the unique emphasis of each?
36. What makes Buddhism work for so many people?
37. What are the three stages of the Chain of Dependent Origination and what does this chain mean in Buddhist thinking?
38. How was Buddhism transported to Sri Lanka? What changes occurred in the role of the laity with the advent of the Mahayana tradition?
39. What is the doctrine of the Three Bodies (Trikaya)?
40. How has Zen Buddhism influenced Japanese art?
41. What are the four categories of concerns in the Confucian classics and how are they understood? How did religious ritual become an indispensable part of state governance in ancient China? In an effort to create a female Confucian tradition, what did Madame Zheng emphasize?
42. What are three elements from the Daoist tradition that pique the interest of Westerners? What was Laozi's view of Confucian rites?
43. What was Zhuangzi's idea of the sage? In Daoism, the ultimate Void is formless; given this, how is it visualized?
44. What is the relationship between the popular and elite religion in China?
45. The Korean shamanistic approach to deities and spirits was expressed through which folk activities?
46. What are the Huang-Lao Silk Manuscripts and why are they important?
47. What are eight reasons for Buddhism's popularity in China?
48. What were the social conditions of the early Song dynasty that allowed for a re-assertion of Confucian ideas? How did religion in China fare immediately after the 1966 Cultural Revolution? What story explains how the mythical King Dangun founded Old Joseon? Who are the traditional household deities in Korean folk or shamanistic traditions?
49. Contrast the Japanese ideas of religious belief and practice with those of Western Christianity.
50. Why was Todaiji built and what can it tell us about Japanese approaches to religion?
51. What did the term "honji suijaku" from the Buddhist Lotus Sutra mean, and how did Shinto change it in the 1500s?
52. What are the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism? How did Pure Land become the most popular form of Buddhism in Japan?
53. Who was Nichiren and what did he teach?
54. What are five forms of Shinto practice?
55. What are five examples of the cultural expressions of religion in Japan?
56. Describe the rise and fall of Christianity in Japan.
57. What happened to Shinto during the Meiji period?
58. What were the religious developments in post-1945 Japan? How did the Japanese believe spirits are able to pervade objects such as trees or animals? What did the Nara government do to prevent religious organizations from undermining the state? How did Dogen get around the prohibition of funeral rites for all but the clergy and increase his following in the thirteenth century? What is the Obon festival? How has the notion of "funeral Buddhism" shifted in modern times?
59. How did the conflict in Sri Lanka's resurgence of Buddhist fervor amongst the Sinhalese faction? In what ways is the application of the term "fundamentalism" problematic?
60. To what does the term "Hindutva" refer?

## 11. Key terms to remember

### Indian tradition

Atman	avatara	Bhagavad Gita	bhakti	brahmin
dharma	karma	kshatriya	mantra	om
puja	Puranas	Ramayana	samsara	shruti
shudra	smrti	tantra	trimurti	Upanishads
vaishya	Vedas	yoga		

### Sikh tradition

Adi Granth	Akal Purakh)	Dasam Granth	Five Ks	gurdwara
Khalsa	kirtan	Mul Mantar	nam-simaran	Panth

### Jaina tradition

ajiva	anuvratas	caturvidhyasangha	Digambaras	gunasthanas
Jina	jiva	Mahavira	mahavratas	Namokar Mantra
paap	punya	Svetambara	Tatthvartha Sutra	Tirthankara
upvas				

### Islamic tradition

Islam	Adhan	Shari'a
Allah	Qibla	Isnad
Salat	Qur'an	Fatwa
Hijra	Salat	Zakat
Sura	Aya	Hadith
Ansar	Sahaba	Shahada
Ijtihad	Jihad	Sunna
Shi'a	Khilafa	Sufi

### Buddhist tradition

anatman	bhikshu, bhikshuni	bodhisattva	Chan/Son/Zen	dharma
Hinayana	karma	Mahayana	nirvana	parinirvana
Pure Land	Rupa	sangha	Shakyamuni	sutra
Theravada	Three Jewels/Triple	Tripitaka "Three baskets"	Upasaka	Vajrayana

### Chinese tradition

Dao	De	Zhuang-zi	Xi Wang-mu	Guang-yu
zhen ren	Kongzi	Laozi	Meng Ke	qigong/neigong
qi	shen (spirit)	jing (semen)	ren	li (ritual)
wuwei	wuwo	xiao	Xunzi	Jin dan
Bailian jiao	I guan dao			

Japanese tradition

Amenominakanushi	aramitama	Harae	Izanagi	Izanami
Jinja-Shintō	Kagura	kami	kami-no-michi	kamidana
kannagara	Kōshitsu-Shintō	Minzoku-Shintō	nigimitama	Omairi
shinto	yomi			

**12. Example of MULTIPLE CHOICE test**

- 1) In China, \_\_\_\_\_ is a Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion who sees and hears the suffering of all sentient beings. 1) \_\_\_\_\_  
 A) Linji                      B) Guanyin                      C) Laozi                      D) Guan Gong
  
- 2) Chinese religions are marked by an emphasis on \_\_\_\_\_. 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
 A) being with the Dao                      B) right action  
 C) action based on *de*                      D) being a superior human
  
- 3) Kongzi lived from \_\_\_\_\_. 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
 A) 479 to 551 CE                      B) 501 to 551 CE  
 C) 551 to 479 BCE                      D) 479 to 325 BCE
  
- 4) *Inward Training* recalls early Confucianism in its attribution of a kind of mystical efficacy to \_\_\_\_\_. 4) \_\_\_\_\_  
 A) the Mandate of Heaven                      B) familial wisdom  
 C) the proper execution of rites                      D) the virtue of an exemplary person
  
- 5) Moral cultivation in the Confucian world view rested upon \_\_\_\_\_. 5) \_\_\_\_\_  
 A) strong socio-political control                      B) mastery of the heart-mind (*xin*)  
 C) strong family discipline                      D) practising martial arts
  
- 6) Korea's foundation myths contain elements reminiscent of the shamanist stream in Daoism, including \_\_\_\_\_. 6) \_\_\_\_\_  
 A) marriage between gods and human beings  
 B) nature deities  
 C) ascension into heaven  
 D) all of the above
  
- 7) In Japan, *kami* have two sides: \_\_\_\_\_. 7) \_\_\_\_\_  
 A) the helpful and the unhelpful                      B) the peaceful and the destructive  
 C) the male and the female                      D) the personal and the impersonal
  
- 8) The Japanese bodhisattva with the reputation for intervening in human affairs is \_\_\_\_\_ 8) \_\_\_\_\_  
 A) Kannon                      B) Hachiman                      C) Vairocana                      D)

### 13. EXAMPLES OF ESSAY TOPICS

- 1) What are the basic elements of the story in the *Ramayana*?
- 2) What are three different theories on the origins of Hinduism?
- 3) What is the *trimurti* concept and how is it misleading?
- 4) Why are followers of Jainism concerned with conveying their message?
- 5) Why do Jainas say the only way to moksha is through non-violence?
- 6) What are koans in Buddhism and how are they used?
- 7) What were the social conditions at the time of Buddhism's emergence?
- 8) In general terms, discuss the major differences between the Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist traditions and identify what, if anything, they share in common.
- 9) What were some of the Confucian critiques of Buddhism?
- 10) What did the Neo-Confucians promote in Korea?
- 11) What were the major events in the rise and fall of Christianity in Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?
- 12) Describe the relationship between Buddhism and Shinto (*kami* spirits) in Japan.
- 13) What are the two major motivations underpinning Japanese religious practices?