

Religion in Asia: Weekly Reflections

General Instructions

For weeks 2-13, you can make a post to Canvas by Sunday at noon. Your post should engage substantively with the lecture video and/or reading that is due the same day. This assignment will allow you to collect your thoughts about the material from solo phase and feel better prepared to discuss it. On alternating weeks, you can submit a public reflection or a private reflection. If you registered for this class via religious studies, you should do public reflections on even weeks and private reflections on odd weeks. If you registered via history, you should do public reflections on odd weeks and private reflections on even weeks. Deadlines that appear on Canvas should correctly reflect this.

This document describes both public and private reflections. Public reflections are straightforward and described in one section. Since private reflections have two paragraphs with distinct requirements, there are two separate sections in this document describing what to do for each paragraph.

Public Reflections

These are meant to be easier than private reflections as they don't require any form of analysis (unless you want to). You are encouraged to post something that might make an idea from the reading/lecture more memorable or otherwise help you and your classmates learn. For example, you could post:

- A quick summary of a point you found interesting (analysis optional). This could be written, but it could be an audio or video recording.
- An image related to the material. This could be original or an image you find online (mention your source, if it's not obvious). It can also be a meme or an animated GIF. If you think the relevance will not be clear from the image itself, provide a short caption to provide context.

The only requirements for success are:

- Convince me that you've done the reading and/or watched the lecture video by posting something relevant.
- Put an amount of effort into your post that's roughly comparable to writing about 100 words.

Private Reflections: Critical Analysis Paragraph

One part of your Private Reflection should be a paragraph that focuses on one detail or theme from the reading and/or lecture video and subjects it to some analysis. It's strongly encouraged to do this by thinking about the current unit's three themes and/or by making connections between the current material and material from the past. *At least half* of what you write should be your own analysis; no more than half should be summary or description.

Tips for Writing Good Analysis Paragraphs

- What you write does not need to be as formal as a major research paper or essay and can be more personal. But do try to avoid being very sloppy with grammar and spelling.
- Use simple citations: (Author, page) or (Class, date). This is a good skill to develop that will improve your take-homes.
- Students often try to do too much with their reading reflections. Your reflection should not read like a laundry list of thoughts you had while doing the reading – if your reflection looks like this you are not fulfilling the third item I list under evaluation. Especially when you are writing something this short, it is important that you pick a specific point to make and make it in detail. In short, depth is better than breadth!
- On a related note, avoid the temptation to summarize the entire reading. Your ability to make connections in your analysis is more important than a general summary.
- One of the most common problems with reflections is that they do not include any substantive analysis. Be sure not to neglect this aspect of the assignment! It is normal to need to work on this as the semester goes on, but here are a few questions to think about as you are preparing your reflections:
 - How do the topics discussed in the text related to important ideas in religious studies (e.g. definitions of religion, ritual theory, the role of texts)?
 - How does what you read compare to what we have read earlier in the semester?
 - Was something surprising to you? If so, why? How might we learn not to take our own cultural norms for granted by reading something like this?
 - Does what you read compare interestingly to something from your own religious background? If so, you can analyze the text through comparison, so long as you are doing so respectfully and avoid making theological (normative and prescriptive) assertions.

Assessment

Below you will find the three main criteria I will use to determine if the reflection paragraph meets the standard of the assignment together with common ways students will miss fulfilling each criterion:

- It should be clear that you have read and paid attention well enough to understand the significance of the details you have chosen to analyze.
 - A detail from the material is brought up without demonstrating any understanding of its larger context.
 - The reflection focuses on a trivial piece of information or engages with information from the reading superficially.
- It should be clear that you are actively thinking about the material and making connections.
 - The entire paragraph is summary, sometimes with “interesting” and its synonyms peppered throughout.
- What you write should be clear and focused.
 - The paragraph makes several different points without a strong thematic connection; none of these points are explored in depth.

Sample Critical Analysis Paragraphs

- 1) This reading is very interesting and a bit confusing as Raymond Dawson and D.C. Lau translate *The Analects* and the *Mencius*. The two books focus on the translation of the Master and the book showed the importance and significance of the Master to their religion and how much his decisions impact others. Confucianism emphasizes its importance on the Master and how people look up to the Master and his beliefs and practices and it just shows the power and control the Master had. It seems like the Master has a mindset where power controls one's position in society as the Master says, "Those who are better than average may talk about superior matters, but those who are worse than average may not talk about superior matters." I find Confucianism and the Master's ideology of humaneness to be fascinating and when the book transitions over to Mencius, where his focus is on what makes a person strong in society. Overall, I believe this reading gives readers a good idea of what this religion is based on in terms of human behavior.
- 2) In Book 3, Meng Yi Zi, Ziyou, and Zixia enquire about the topic of filial piety. In response, the Master explains that filial piety entails being able to provide sustenance *and* reverence to one's parents. In Confucianism, it is quite evident how important it is for the "young to bear the brunt of their elders' labour." Showing devotion and demonstrating respect proves to be an extremely cherished virtue amongst Confucian – and in broader terms, Eastern – thought, and yet I wonder, why didn't these values catch on in the West? Generally speaking, I think young people in the West show respect for their superiors, however, it is in a different sense; they don't necessarily prove to share the same degree of respect. In the US, nursing homes are extremely common, proving that young people oftentimes don't directly take care of their parents when they grow old. I wonder what Confucian thinkers would feel about the idea of nursing homes? Would they be utterly horrified by the fact that children put their parents in homes for other people to take care of them? I think it is interesting to grapple with this idea of filial piety, and to try to understand how it became so engrained in Eastern way of life, whereas, it doesn't render as much weight in the West.

Private Reflections: Objectives and Strategies Paragraph

Private reflections are also expected to contain a paragraph addressing your objectives in the course and your progress toward them. The goal of this paragraph is to develop something called “metacognition.” This is an ability to recognize how you mind works, what you do and don’t know, and how well you’re doing (or will do) at a task. In short, it allows you to play to your strengths and shore up your weaknesses. We can improve our metacognition by setting goals for ourselves, formulating a strategy to reach that goal, and reflecting on how effective our strategy is at each step.

Topic Suggestions and Assessment

Students who are planning to do a culminating reflection that 1) is not an essay, 2) is not based on a suggested essay prompt, or 3) uses a source I haven’t recommended should communicate their plan and rationale to me at least a week before you plan to start working on the culminating reflection. You can use one or more private reflections to do this.

Here are some suggested questions for you to think about as you write this paragraph:

- What did you know about the course’s topic before coming in?
- What do you hope to get out of this class? How will you do this? What do you need from me to help?
- What’s a study habit you’d like to get rid of, change, or pick up while taking this class?
- What is some feedback you’ve received in a previous class that you hope to address in this class?
- Do you have a response to any of my feedback thus far?
- What is a new learning strategy you’ve tried in the last couple of weeks? Did it help?
- What is something you’re struggling with and what are you doing well at? How might you improve in the areas where you’re struggling?
- What concept have you found most confusing over the last couple of weeks?

You don’t necessarily need to address any or all of these over the course of the semester. As long as you make a good-faith effort to the general topic of personal objectives, learning strategies, and self-assessment, you will meet the standard of the assignment.