

# RELS 357: The Religions of China and East Asia

Fall 2019 • Manhattan College

Section 1: MR 12–1:15pm • DLS 300

Section 2: MR 1:30–2:45pm • HAY 205

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**Office Hours:** MR 3:30–4:20pm, or by appointment

## Course Overview

The religions of China and East Asia encompass such a diverse array of cultural traditions, philosophical movements, and ritual practices that the very notion of “religion” in East Asia is difficult to discern. In Part One of this course we begin with the ritual and ethical writings of Confucius, Laozi, and the major philosophers of the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE). In Part Two we turn to the introduction of Buddhism to East Asia and the development of Daoism in China, as demonstrated by the *Journey to the West*. Finally, in Part Three we focus on the religious traditions of modern Japan, including the effects of the World Wars on Shintoism and Zen Buddhism. In addition to learning the key ideas and practices of East Asian religions, throughout the course we will also consider broader human questions, such as the relationship between faith and doubt, nature and ritual, and the interaction of multiple religious traditions in the context of a pluralistic society.

## Course Objectives

1. Religion in Context: We will analyze religions of East Asia within the context of their cultural settings and historical developments.
2. Theories and Methods: We will assess sources and comparative methods in the academic study of religion, gaining critical awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of methods in the academic study of religion.
3. Critical Reflections on Tradition: We will appraise and critically reflect on the key ideas, practices, material culture, and social structures in East Asian religious traditions.
4. Contemporary Relevance: We will also evaluate the concepts and terminology of East Asian religions within the context of contemporary life (such as art, politics, class, gender, law, ethics, and so forth), especially in the context of *Novice to Master* in Part Three of the course.

## Attendance

Students are expected to attend each class session. You are allowed three absences (for any reason) without penalty; absences for athletics are included in these three. Beginning on your fourth absence, your course grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter-grade (e.g. B+, B, B-) per absence. On your 9th absence, you will automatically fail the course. If you do not show up for

class, my assumption is that you are deliberately making the choice not to attend, and that you understand the attendance policy.

### **Deadlines**

Missing deadlines will affect your grade. Late work will be penalized 5 points per day. If you do not turn in an assignment, I will not chase you around and pester you to turn it in. My assumption is that you are aware of the due dates and are choosing not to turn it in.

### **Participation**

Please complete the assigned readings for each day before you come to class. Bring the readings to class and be prepared to discuss them. Be an active reader! We will read several different genres throughout the semester: religious treatises, ethnography, history, academic analysis, biography, and so forth. Take notes when you read. Pay attention to the genre and time period of the reading, as well as to the author's argument. Who is the audience for the reading? Is the author persuasive?

### **Citations and Plagiarism**

You will be expected to cite the course readings in your work, but please ask me before you cite outside works (websites and other books). Plagiarism should be understood as taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own, and it will not be tolerated in this course. For more information on plagiarism and its consequences, see [<inside.manhattan.edu/student-life/dean-of-students/code-conduct.php#violationsintegrity>.](http://inside.manhattan.edu/student-life/dean-of-students/code-conduct.php#violationsintegrity)

### **Grades**

The grading scale for this class is: A = 100–94, A- = 93–90, B+ = 89–87, B = 86–84, B- = 83–80, C+ = 79–77, C = 76–74, C- = 73–70, D+ = 69–67, D = 66–64, D- = 63–60. In this course, a “B” means: “Good.” Grades above this reflect performance where a student brings a greater degree of creativity, accuracy, insight, energy, and inquiry to the material. Grades below this reflect poorer performance. Note that you must complete all assignments to pass the course (i.e. you cannot decide to skip some of the assignments). Below are the assignments that will make up your final grade:

- 1. Participation (10% of total grade):** The success of this class depends on your active participation. You are expected to be prepared and to participate in discussion. What I am looking for is critical, accurate, creative, and otherwise thoughtful engagement with the course materials. You are not required to be the loudest person in class, but you should have prepared for class so that you are able to discuss the materials and ask questions.
- 2. Two Reading Responses (15% of final grade; 7.5% each):** In addition to critically discussing the readings in class, you will also be expected to compose two short reading responses (RR) throughout the semester. Each RR will be a 500-word response (two

double-spaced pages) to a prompt that can be found on Moodle. These RRs are designed to give you space to read carefully, think critically, and compose a short analysis or argument regarding what you have read. Each RR should be typed, printed, and turned in at the beginning of class (see schedule below).

**3. Exams (50% of final grade; 25% each):** Two exams make up half of your grade:

- **Midterm Exam One:** October 10<sup>th</sup>, covering the material in Part One of the course.
- **Midterm Exam Two:** November 7<sup>th</sup>, covering the material in Part Two of the course.

**4. Final Paper (25% of final grade):** Building upon the interpretation and communication skills developed in the Reading Responses, the term paper will be a longer analytical essay. We will read *Novice to Master* in Part Three of the course, and you will need to compose a 1250-word essay (approximately five double-spaced pages) based on a thesis about East Asian religions. The essay should reflect both an understanding of *Novice to Master* as well as the discussions of its implications that we will hold in class. Due December 12<sup>th</sup>.

### Required Books

You are required to buy one copy of each of these books. They are available both at the bookstore and online:

Morinaga, Soko. *Novice to Master: An Ongoing Lesson in the Extent of My Own Stupidity*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2004.

Puett, Michael, and Christine Gross-Loh. *The Path: What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us About the Good Life*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2016.

### Articles and Selections

These readings are posted on the course Moodle site

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

de Bary, William, and Irene Bloom, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Keown, Damien. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Wu, Cheng'en. *The Monkey and the Monk: A Revised Abridgment of the Journey to the West*. Translated and edited by Anthony C. Yu. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006 [1977].

## Part One: The Fragmented World of Ancient China

### Week 1: The Age of Complacency

Monday (8/26): Introductions

Thursday (8/29): Intro to Chinese Philosophy

Puett, *The Path*, 1–22.

### Week 2: Ritual and As-if Worlds

Monday (9/2): Labor Day (No Class)

Thursday (9/5): Confucius

Puett, *The Path*, 23–53.

### Week 3: The Fragmented World

Monday (9/9): The *Analects*

de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 41–63.

**RR#1 due at the beginning of class**

Thursday (9/12): Mencius

Puett, *The Path*, 55–85.

### Week 4: The Creation of Worlds

Monday (9/16): Laozi

Puett, *The Path*, 87–117.

Thursday (9/19): The *Daodejing*

de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*,  
77–94.

### Week 5: Spiritual Cultivation

Monday (9/23): The *Inward Training*

Puett, *The Path*, 119–39.

Thursday (9/26): Zhuangzi

Puett, *The Path*, 141–61.

### Week 6: Spontaneity and Artifice

Monday (9/30): I'm out of town (No class)

de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 95–111

Thursday (10/3): Xunzi

Puett, *The Path*, 163–81.

### Week 7: The Age of Possibility

Monday (10/7): Review

Puett, *The Path*, 183–98.

Thursday (10/10): Exam

**Midterm Exam One**

## Part Two: Buddhism and Daoism in Imperial China

### Week 8: Early Chinese Buddhism

Monday (10/14): Fall Break (No Class)

Tuesday (10/15): Buddhism (Mon. Schedule)  
Keown, *Buddhism*, 15–43.

Thursday (10/17): Early Debates in China  
de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*,  
415–29.

### Week 9: Later Chinese Buddhism

Monday (10/21): Later Buddhism  
Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*, 44–80.

**RR#2 due at the beginning of class**

Thursday (10/24): *Journey to the West*  
Wu, *Journey to the West*, 1–34.

### Week 10: Challenging Heaven

Monday (10/28): *Journey to the West*  
Wu, *Journey to the West*, 35–66.

Thursday (10/31): *Journey to the West*  
Wu, *Journey to the West*, 67–96.

### Week 11: Learning Humility

Monday (11/4): *Journey to the West*  
Wu, *Journey to the West*, 97–127.

Thursday (11/7): Midterm Exam Two

## Part Three: Religion in Modern Japan

### Week 12: Belief

Monday (11/11): An Overview of Shinto  
Breen and Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto*, 1–23.

Thursday (11/14): Early Life  
Morinaga, *Novice to Master*, 11–40.

### Week 13: Doubt

Monday (11/18): Early Training  
Morinaga, *Novice to Master*, 41–78.

Thursday (11/21): Later Training  
Morinaga, *Novice to Master*, 81–108.  
**Extra credit due at beginning of class**

### Week 14: Thanksgiving Holiday (No Class)

Monday (11/25): I'm at Conference (No Class)  
Thursday (11/28): Holiday (No Class)

### Week 15: Determination

Monday (12/2): Master  
Morinaga, *Novice to Master*, 111–32.

Thursday (12/5): Review  
Morinaga, *Novice to Master*, 133–54.

**Final Paper Due December 12<sup>th</sup>**