HONORS 240.001: VALUE AND TRADITION IN ASIAN RELIGIONS  
(Fall 2013) M-W 4:00-5:15  Room 320 Maybank Hall

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Course Description and Goals
This course will explore the religious visions, values, and practices by which people from South and East Asia have understood their life experiences. One goal of this course is for you to achieve an accurate understanding of the religious traditions that are practiced in India, China, and Japan on those societies’ own terms, and to evaluate those traditions in a manner that is both sympathetic and properly critical. We will consider representative material drawn from Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and the “New Religions” of Japan. However, the course is not designed to serve as a systematic survey of Asian religious traditions. Rather than aiming at breadth, the course is designed around major conceptual themes that include: discerning between illusion and reality; religion’s role in reinforcing social hierarchies; meditation and the diversity of religious experiences; pilgrimage and spiritual journeys; death, the afterlife, and ancestor worship; religion, gender, and sexuality; monasticism, asceticism, and the hermit’s life; the transformation of foreign traditions to fit native worldviews; and the effects of modernization on religions today. We will also watch a number of contemporary films that explore the conflicts between tradition and modernity in contemporary Asian cultures.

The course will follow an easterly route, beginning in India and moving to China and Japan, at the same time as we move from ancient times down to the present day. We begin with the ancient Indian civilization that appeared some 3,000 years ago and end with religious debates over the topics of abortion and organ transplant in Japan today. Through lecture and discussion we will consider the extent to which conversion from one tradition to another is possible and how, given the myriad doctrines and practices encountered in Asia, one might go about defining the word “religion” in Asia. We will see that Asian religiosity tends to have different emphases than the Judeo-Christian traditions. The course will call into question our common distinctions between self and society, church and state, and religion and spirituality.

Goals for students enrolled in this course are: 1) to gain empathy for the enduring visions and values that have shaped Asian civilizations; 2) to become aware of the diversity of religious traditions as well as the dynamic process of borrowing, conflict, and interaction between them; 3) to foster critical thinking about the interpretive issues raised by the study of Asian religious literature; and 4) to formulate an argument and express it concisely in a short essay. Readings cover a wide variety of primary and secondary materials that address the themes of the course, including several contemporary novels, travelogues, and short stories by Asian authors.

Required Texts available at the College’s Barnes & Noble Bookstore:
- Jonah Blank, Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God: Retracing the Ramayana through India $18.00
- Satomi Myodo, Journey in Search of the Way: The Spiritual Autobiography of Satomi Myodo $29.95
- Shinmon Aoki, Coffinman: Journal of a Buddhist Mortician 2002 $14.95

There are also required Electronic Readings (ER), pdf of articles, short stories, and selections from sacred scriptures, available on OAKS under HONS 240, which registered students can access after they login to MyCharleston (http://my.cofc.edu). Please print out each ER article and bring it to class on the day that it will be discussed.

Strongly Recommended
Ariel Glucklich, Climbing Chamundi Hill: 1001 Steps with a Storyteller and a Reluctant Pilgrim  
(This book is out of print so it will be made available as a pdf [ER#6a-b], but used copies can be purchased).
Course Requirements

There is no course prerequisite for this class or any knowledge presumed about Asian cultures and religions, but it has as a requirement the desire to read challenging and unusual materials and to engage in conversation about these readings. The following points identify these expectations explicitly.

- **Active participation in discussion and regular attendance in class (10% of grade)**
  Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. Asking questions and offering your own ideas and views during seminar discussions are a crucial part of this course. Please come to class with ideas to share and questions that can help our class engage in meaningful discussion. A number of documentary and Asian feature films will be shown in class, as this is the best substitute for a direct cultural experience of Asian religions. The films too will serve as a basis for discussion and you will be expected to view them critically as carefully crafted images that are used to communicate a particular point of view. Attendance records will be kept for each class. There will be 3 allowed absences; 4 or more absences will negatively affect your grade. After 8 absences, you will be dropped from the class. If you have excused absences (illness, emergency) please contact the Undergraduate Dean’s Office to document the reason for your absence. You are responsible for making up any absences; please get any notes on missed lectures from classmates.

- **10 Short 2-page Papers (5% each, or 50% of final grade)**
  Almost each week you will write a short essay in response to questions that relate to the reading assigned for that week. These essays will require that you analyze the text closely, formulate an interpretation, and express it concisely in two pages. The essays are due in class on the day when we will discuss the assigned topic. The questions for the assignment are open to different interpretations without a single “correct” answer. *Late essays are not accepted* since the topic will be discussed in class.

- **Two tests on 10/2 and 10/23 (12.5% and 7.5% each, or 20% of final grade)**

- **Final Exam on 12/9 (20% of final grade)**
  The two tests and the final exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions, and the identification and explanation of key passages from primary sources and scriptures. The final exam will also include essay questions that will require you to synthesize the themes of the course and compare and contrast the various Asian religious traditions. Review sheets will be provided beforehand. If you miss an exam or test and provide a documented excuse, I do give makeup tests but they are harder than the original test; an unexcused missed test or exam counts as a 0.

### Grading Scale

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**Academic Integrity**: There is a zero-tolerance policy toward plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty in this course. This means that anyone caught taking credit for work that is not his or her own, or cheating in any other way, will receive a failing grade for the entire course. A student found responsible for academic dishonesty will receive a **XF grade** in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty.

**SNAP students**: If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please present a letter to me from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information on the SNAP program, see: [http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu](http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu)
Seminar Topics and Reading Assignments for HONS 240

The following schedule of topics and the list of readings is provisional, but the writing assignments are due in class on the day designated. The following abbreviation will be used: ER#1 refers to the first Electronic Reading assignment found on OAKS.

**Week 1  Studying Religion in the Secular Academy: Interpretive Frames**

8/21  Introduction: What is “Religion?” How do we study it in a secular school?

**Week 2  Getting Inside Hindus’ Heads (and bodies)**

Excerpts from *The Truman Show* (1998)

8/28  A Hindu Story about a Hunter and a Sage: What does the Sage See?  
(ER#4-5: “Vedanta—Shankara;” & “Other Scholars’ Myths: The Hunter and the Sage”)  
**Assignment #1:** In ER#5 the author presents an Indian myth about a hunter and a sage, and she suggests that this story can be interpreted as a metaphor for scholars of religion. What does she mean when she writes: “The hunting sage is my idea of the right sort of historian of religion?” What critique does she offer of those scholars who study others’ myths in order to promote them as “true stories”? Is objectivity a desirable goal for the student of other religions or is it a “myth” that should be abandoned?

**Week 3  The Classical Hindu Worldview: Dreams, Illusions, and Reality**

9/2  Hindu Ethics: Stories about Life & Death, Karma & Rebirth  
(ER#6A *Climbing Chamundi Hill*: vii-57)

9/4  Exploring Illusion & Reality with a Hindu Storyteller  
(ER#6B: *Climbing Chamundi Hill*: 57-108; 131-143; 196-246)  
**Assignment #2:** The stories told in this book seem to spiral in cycles, both structurally with stories inside stories, and thematically with theories of karma, death and rebirth, of asceticism and eroticism, samsara and moksha. Explore how this spiraling structure blurs the boundary between fiction and reality, between storyteller and character, and between subjectivity and reality. What profound religious insights does the American “pilgrim” learn about such cycles and his life from the stories told while climbing Chamundi Hill?

**Week 4  Hindu Social Norms: Dharma and Caste**

9/9  On Dharma: Doing One’s Duty  
(ER#7: Hindu Scriptures on “That You Are,” etc.; *Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God*, 1-52)  
Film clips: *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008)

9/11  The Hindu Social Order: Caste Hierarchy and Purity-Pollution Taboos  
(*Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God*, pp. 53-80; 111-139)  
Film: *Saheri’s Choice*
Week 5   Retelling the Hindu *Ramayana* and the Story of the Buddha

9/16  Illusion and Evil in the *Ramayana*  
*(Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God, pp. 141-200)*  
**Assignment #3:** Respond to the following statement from Jonah Blank:  
“How could Rama, the very personification of good, commit an act of evil? How could Ravana, the Lord of the Demons, behave like a true gentleman? These are questions that Indians debate every day, at the dinner table, at the temple, at the tea hut near the village well. Truck-driver philosophers and seamstress theologians come up with many explanations, but never with an answer. There is no answer. Good and evil are not the separate entities we would like to believe.” Is such a view compatible with Hindu notions of Dharma?

9/18  The Buddhist Model of Renunciation: the Story of Siddhartha  
*(ER#8: “The Legend of Buddha Shakyamuni”)*

Week 6   The Teachings of the Buddha and the Practice of Meditation

9/23  The Buddha’s First Sermons and the Establishment of the Sangha  
*(ER#9-10: “Vinaya Vignettes” and “Death of Gotama Buddha”)*

9/25  Buddhist Meditation: Process of Purification and its Purpose  
*(ER#11-12: “Buddhist Meditation;” Buddhaghosa’s *The Path of Purification)*  
**Assignment #4:** According to popular conceptions, meditation is a means to achieve peace, tranquility, and happiness. Is this confirmed by the selections about Buddhist meditation by Buddhaghosa from *The Path of Purification* (ER#12)?  
Documentary: *The Footsteps of the Buddha*

Week 7   The Development of Mahayana Buddhism in India

9/30  Mahayana Buddhism: The Ethics of a Bodhisattva  

10/2  Mahayana Non-Dualism and Gender Differences: Are Bodhisattvas Gender Benders?  
*(ER#14: “Do Innate Female Traits and Characteristics Exist?” “Gender and Emptiness”)*  
**Test on Indian Religions: Hinduism and Buddhism (12.5% of Grade)**

Week 8   Understanding the Way (*Dao*) in Ancient China

10/7  An Overview of China’s “Three Religions” and Popular Religion  
*(ER#15-16: “Introduction” and “Deities and Ancestors in Early Oracle Inscriptions”)*

10/9  Classical Confucian Ethics: Is Benevolence Innate in Humanity? How is it cultivated?  
*(ER#17: Selections from *Mencius)*  
**Assignment #5:** Mencius uses a number of arguments and analogies to demonstrate that human nature is good. These include a king’s decision to sacrifice a lamb instead of an ox, a child about to fall into a well, and water running downhill. Is Mencius convincing?
Week 9  Chinese Daoism: Traveling on the Way

10/14  Fall Break

10/16  Tales of Daoist Hermits and Mountain Sages: How the Way is One (or Won)
       (ER#18: Selections from Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits pts 1-3)

Week 10  Chan Buddhism in China

10/21  Chinese Buddhist Family Values: The Tale of a Monk who Rescues his Mom from Hell
       (ER#19: “Maudgalyayana”)  Images: Scroll Paintings of the Chinese Netherworld
       Assignment #6: What motivates Maudgalyayana (Chinese: Mulien) to rescue his mother from
       hell? What might the purpose of this story be? How does this story advance Buddhist doctrinal
       and ideological claims for its Chinese audience?

10/23  Chan Creeds, Myth, and History: Patriarchs in Search of a Tradition
       Test on Chinese Religions (7.5% of grade)

Week 11  Buddhist and Christian Interactions in Japan

10/28  Christian Conversion and Apostasy in Japan: Deus Destroyed by a Zen Critic
       (ER#22: “Deus Destroyed;” begin Silence)

10/30  The Persecution of Christians in Japan: Does Apostasy Save or Destroy Rodrigues?
       (Silence)
       Assignment #7: In Silence is Rodrigues saved or damned by his apostasy when he steps on the
       fumi? Why does Rodrigues feel the sudden “onrush of joy” mentioned at the end of Chapter 10?
       Your essay should address the complex issue of his motivation and his commitment to the Church
       as a Catholic.

Week 12  The Life and Spiritual Pilgrimage of a Modern Japanese Woman

11/4   Satomi’s Spiritual Search: Spirit Possession, Hallucinations, and a Breakdown
       (Journey in Search of the Way, 3-41; 46-50; optional 163-186)

11/6   Satomi’s Satori and Return “Home” to Zen
       (Journey in Search of the Way, 51-65; 71-79; 93-111; optional 198-206)
       Assignment #8: In her autobiography, Satomi Myodo records her impassioned search for
       enlightenment and her intense personal religious experiences. She experiments with various
       religious practices and has several dramatic spiritual experiences. However, she fails to find any
       lasting satisfaction until she meets her Zen master and practices Zen. What does she gain from
       her Zen practice? How does she re-evaluate her spiritual quest?
Week 13  The Impact of “New Religions” on Contemporary Japanese Society

11/11  What’s So New About Japanese “New” Religions?

11/13  Aum Shinrikyo: Apocalyptic Violence in a New Age Religion
   (ER#24: “In the Wake of Aum”)
   Assignment #9: After reviewing the “universe of belief” in Aum Shinrikyo, much of which is rooted in Japanese religious traditions, what key factors can you identify that made Aum Shinrikyo such a violent movement? Do you believe that the followers of Aum Shinrikyo were “brainwashed” or psychologically coerced?

Week 14  The Ritual Domestication of Death: The Life of a Buddhist Mortician

11/18  The Ritual Purification of Death
   (Coffinman chapters 1-2)
   Film: Departures (2008) pt. 1

11/20  Remembering the Dead, Learning to Love, Feeling Filial
   (Coffinman chapter 3)
   Film: Departures (2008) pt. 2

Thanksgiving Week

11/25  No class--cancelled

11/27  Thanksgiving Break: Give Thanks, Eat Turkey (& Remember Squanto!)

Week 15  Getting Closure on Japanese Religious Ethics and Rituals

12/2  Japanese Attitudes Towards Brain Death and Abortion Today
   (ER#25-27: “Response of Buddhism and Shinto to the Issue of Brain Death and Organ Transplant”; “Death and Beyond: Memorializing One’s Mizuko”; “The Cult of Jizo”)
   Assignment #10: Describe the traditional Japanese attitude towards brain-death and abortion, and the role that ritual plays in determining an individual’s personhood and death. How can these seemingly contradictory attitudes be compatible for the Japanese?
   Images: Mizuko Kuyo memorials

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE

12/9  Final Exam on December 9 (Monday) from 4-7 pm in MYBK 320
HONORS 240 Bibliography for ER Material on OAKS

Week 2: Getting Inside the Heads of Hindus

Week 3: The Classical Hindu Worldview: Dreams, Illusions and Reality

Week 4: Hindu Social Norms: Dharma and Caste

Week 5: Retelling the Ramayana and the Story of the Buddha

Week 6: The Teachings of the Buddha and the Practice of Meditation

Week 7: The Development of Mahayana Buddhism in India

Week 8: Understanding the Way (Dao) in Ancient China

Week 9: Chinese Daoism: Traveling on the Way
**Week 10: Chan Buddhism in China**

**Week 11: Buddhist and Christian Interactions in Japan**

**Week 13: The Impact of “New Religions” on Contemporary Japanese Society**

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