

SEMINAR ON TOPICS IN ASIAN RELIGIONS
Religion 8490
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TOWARD DE-COLONIALIZING EASTERN RELIGIONS:

HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES IN THE CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF RELIGIONS

❖ THE PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

Westerners' interest in the religious traditions of Asia hardly dates back much earlier than the 19th century. By the end of the 20th-century, some scholars were beginning to look back critically upon how Westerners had understood and explained such religions. It is now fairly apparent that the hermeneutics of studying religion involve not just an "objective" analysis of certain data, but also a careful awareness of what the interpreter her/himself is thinking, and why. Why have certain data been regarded as "essential" or "basic" for understanding a given topic, while other data are disregarded, or even ridiculed? Why, indeed, are certain traditions regarded as worthy of great attention, while others are disregarded, or even ridiculed?

In this course, we will read and discuss recent studies by critical scholars who have examined these issues in the cross-cultural study of religion, particularly in regard to East Asian religions. Our principal readings will be from the following works:

Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (2000)
J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (1997)
Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique* (1993)
Galen Amstutz, *Interpreting Amida: History and Orientalism in the Study of Pure Land Buddhism* (1997)
J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought* (2000)

Since class participants will have varying degrees of familiarity with the Asian traditions involved, the instructor will provide background explanations as necessary. But our focus will be more on the issues of interpretation than on specific matters regarding the traditions themselves. In other words, rather than attempt to determine the composition of Saturn's rings, we will focus on the question of whether the telescope is properly designed, whether it is pointed in the right direction, and whether its user is properly aware of his/her own assumptions and decisions. If those issues are not properly addressed, there is no way to know whether looking through the tool will really show us Saturn's rings as they truly are.

Toward the end of the course, each participant will choose a specific topic (e.g., D.

T. Suzuki's influence on how Westerners see Zen or Pure Land Buddhism), and examine the issues that are raised in the pertinent literature. A class presentation, and a written paper on the topic, will be the basis for each participant's grade.

READINGS

[Readings Listed in Square Brackets are Recommended]

1. **"DISCIPLINING RELIGION": METHODOLOGICAL SECULARISM AND "THE IATROGENIC EFFECT OF STUDYING RELIGION"**

King, *Orientalism and Religion*: 41-61

[Kirkland, "Defining Religion"; on webpage]

[Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy and A Rumor of Angels*]

King, *Orientalism and Religion*: 72-81, 94-95

2. **"ORIENTATIONS"**

King, *Orientalism and Religion*: 1-6

Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*: 3-34, 132-38

3. **"BEYOND ORIENTALISM?"**

Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*: 181-190, 205-225

King, *Orientalism and Religion*: [187-207] 207-18

4. **ASIAN RELIGIONS IN SCHOLARLY PRESENTATION AT MILLENNIUM'S END: CRITICAL TAKES BY RUSSELL KIRKLAND**

Review of *A Guide to Oriental Classics*, 3rd ed., by Wm. T. deBary

and Ainslee Embree, *Journal of Chinese Religions* 18 (1990), 188-192

Review of *Religions of India in Practice / Buddhism in Practice / Religions of China in Practice*, ed. by Donald Lopez, *JAAR* 65 (1997), 230-34

"The Study of Religion and Society in Contemporary Asia: Colonialism and Beyond," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 28.3/4 (1996), 59-63

Review of *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, revised edition, ed. by Wm. T. deBary and Irene Bloom, *Education About Asia* (in press)

"On Coveting Thy Neighbor's Tao: Reflections on J. J. Clarke's *The Tao of the West*," *Religious Studies Review* (in press)

5. **"THE 'RELIGIONS' OF 'THE MYSTIC EAST'": DE-ORIENTALIZING "BUDDHISM"**

Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*: 74-76 [80-92] 97-100, 200-205

King, *Orientalism and Religion*: 143-160

[Gregory Schopen, "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions* 31 (1991), 1-23]

Amstutz, *Interpreting Amida*: vii-xii, 1-16, 43-53, 63mid-75bot, 83-87mid, 89-91mid, 103-121

[Amstutz, "...The Case of D. T. Suzuki and Shin Buddhism," *Japanese Religions* 22 (1997), 65-84]

Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*: 3-10, 40-45, 52-67, 89-92, 99-103, 107-110, 118-23 [145-51] 251-57, 266-74

6. "THE 'RELIGIONS' OF 'THE MYSTIC EAST'": DE-ORIENTALIZING "TAOISM"

Kirkland, "Explaining Daoism: Realities, Cultural Constructs, and Emerging Perspectives," in Livia Kohn, ed., *Daoism Handbook* (Brill, 2000), xi-xviii

Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 1-59, 81-89

Kirkland, "Responsible Non-Action in a Natural World," in Norman J. Girardot, Liu Xiaogan, and James Miller, ed., *Taoism and Ecology* (2001), 283-304

Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 90-103, 140-49, 159-65 [184-93] 194-203