



**RELS 310/462**  
**Asian Religions  
and the West**

**Semester 2**  
**2016**

**Department of Theology and Religion**  
**University of Otago**



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## RELS 310/462

# Asian Religions and the West

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*Welcome to this paper on Asian Religions and the West. We teach this paper on campus and by distance learning. The coursebook is written with both groups of students in mind, but some sections will apply to only students on campus and others only to distance students. There are also some differences in what is expected of students at 300 level (whether campus or distance) and what is expected of students at 400 level. These will be explained below, together with other details about the course, so please read through the introduction carefully to make sure you understand what is expected of you.*

## Introduction

This first part of this paper will provide a broad **historical** overview of the major themes in European representations of the religions of China, India, Japan, the Middle East and Tibet over the last five centuries. The second part of the paper will begin with the enormously influential work of Edward Said and will consider some **theoretical** issues arising from the impact of colonialism on European understanding of Asian religions. The final part of the paper will examine a range of further issues including the impact of European thinking about gender and race on representations of Asian religions, and the representation of Asian cultures and religions in science fiction.

The course is wide-ranging, and covers a lot of ground both historically and geographically in surveying the contexts in which Europeans encountered Asian religions. Even as the context changed, however, many of the issues of understanding and representation which arose remained similar, in part because the European parties in the encounter tended to bring similar preconceptions to these different engagements. While the course covers the whole of Asia, you are encouraged to focus on a particular region or religion in which you have an interest or which you have studied before. If, however, you wish to pursue one of the

other regions or religions in greater depth than is provided for here, you are welcome to do so. Students at 400-level may even choose to draw examples from encounters in other parts of the world, for example New Zealand or Africa.

### Aims and learning outcomes

The aims of this paper are:

- to examine European encounters with Asian religions since 1500,
- to develop knowledge of the contexts in which Europeans encountered Asian religions,
- to understand how such religions were conceived and represented, and
- to consider the uses to which such representations were put in European and Asian debate.

Students who successfully complete the paper will have a sound knowledge of:

- the historical contexts in which Europeans have encountered Asian religions since 1500,
- conceptions and representations of Asian religions by European writers (including missionaries, scholars, artists, novelists, philosophers and film-makers),
- recent scholarly critique of such representations,
- the use of Asian religions in debate in both Europe and Asia, and
- the impact of European interest upon the religions themselves.

### Course structure

The course is divided into six modules; the first two examine the different historical contexts in which Europeans have encountered Asian religions and the representations which emerged from those encounters; the next considers the theoretical framework which has been developed in recent decades to understand those representations; the final three modules focus on some particular themes which cut across the different contexts and different religions examined in the first part of the course.

Each module consists of a number of units, dealing with a specific topic. Each unit includes

- a topic overview
- a list of *recommended* reading
- an article or book chapter which is the *required* reading for the unit, and
- in some cases, a second article or chapter, which is *supplementary* reading on the topic.

The dates listed below are the times when students on campus will meet and they provide a guideline for distance students to plan their reading and film viewing. Please ensure that you have read through the study unit and the appropriate section from the reader *before* the tutorial meets (campus students) or the Zoom discussion begins (distance students).

### Module 1 Contexts I

- 11 July Unit 1.1 Introduction: the West and the Rest  
Reading J.J. Clarke, 'Orientalism: Some Conjectures'
- 12 July Unit 1.2 China, Confucianism, the 17th century  
Reading Yu Liu, 'Seeing God Differently'
- 18 July Unit 1.3 India, Hinduism, the 18th century  
Reading Will Sweetman, 'Hinduism – History of Scholarship'
- 19 July Film *Darjeeling Limited*
- 25 July Unit 1.4 Japan, Buddhism, the 19th century  
Reading Robert H. Sharf, 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism'  
Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* (extracts)
- 26 July Tutorial Contexts I

### Module 2 Contexts II

- 1 Aug Unit 2.1 Tibetan Buddhism, the 20th century  
Reading Harry Oldmeadow, 'The Western Quest for "Secret Tibet"'  
David Germano, 'Encountering Tibet'
- 2 Aug Film *Seven Years in Tibet*
- 8 Aug Unit 2.2 Islam, the 19th and 20th centuries  
Reading Zachary Lockman, 'Islam, the West and the rest'
- 9 Aug Tutorial Contexts II

### Module 3 Theories

- 15 Aug Unit 3.1 Orientalism  
Reading Richard King, 'Orientalism and the study of religions'  
A. L. Macfie, *Orientalism: a reader* (extracts)
- 16 Aug Film *The Wind and the Lion*
- 22 Aug Unit 3.2 The invention of Asian religions  
Reading Eric Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Traditions'  
Allan Hanson, 'The Making of the Maori'
- 23 Aug Tutorial Theories
- 29 Aug–2 Sep *Mid-semester break*
- 2 Sept 5pm ***Deadline for submission of essay outline (RELS 310)***  
***Deadline for submission of first essay (RELS 462)***

### Module 4 Gender

- 5 Sept Unit 4.1 Effeminacy  
 Reading Kate Teltscher, 'Hindu masculinity and religion'  
 Ashis Nandy, 'The Psychology of Colonialism'
- 6 Sept Film *M. Butterfly*
- 12 Sept Unit 4.2 Asian women and the West  
 Reading Homa Hoodfar, 'The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads'
- 13 Sept Tutorial Gender

### Module 5 Contemporary issues

- 19 Sept Unit 5.1 Asian despotism  
 Reading Perry Anderson, 'The "Asiatic Mode of Production"'  
 Toby Dodge, 'Corruption, Fragmentation, and Despotism'
- 20 Sept Film *Last Samurai*
- 23 Sept 5pm ***Deadline for submission of essay (RELS 310)***
- 26 Sept Unit 5.2 Green Orientalism  
 Reading Lynn White, 'The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis'  
 Will Sweetman, 'Romanticism—Western toward Asian religions'
- 27 Sept Tutorial Contemporary issues
- 30 Sept 5pm ***Deadline for submission of second essay (RELS 462)***

### Module 6 Science Fiction

- 3 Oct Unit 6.1 Science Fiction I  
 Reading Kevin J. Wetmore, 'May the Tao be With You'
- 4 Oct Film SciFi movie extracts
- 10 Oct Unit 6.2 Science Fiction II  
 Reading Rebecca Brown, 'Orientalism in *Firefly* and *Serenity*'
- 11 Oct Tutorial Science Fiction

### Readings

For each topic you should read the 'Topic overview' in the coursebook. All students should also read the *required* reading, which will form the basis for discussion in the tutorials and online. The *supplementary* reading included for some units is intended primarily for students taking the course at 400-level, but will also be useful for other students. The articles

and chapters which make up the required and supplementary reading have in most cases been abbreviated<sup>1</sup> to keep the focus on the most important sections, but the full versions are available through the library [and e-Reserve on Blackboard]. The references in the readings follow the style used in the original publication.

The articles in this coursebook represent the bare *minimum* reading required for successful completion of the paper. You should also read extensively in the works listed as *recommended* reading for each unit, which are intended to provide a starting point for research when writing an essay or preparing a topic for the exam.

## Films and tutorials

The films will be screened in the double lecture slot on Wednesdays. In most other weeks on Wednesdays there will only be a one-hour lecture or tutorial. Distance students will need to make their own arrangements for viewing the films which will be screened on campus. The films are available through the Remote Library Service, and are also widely available for rental.

## Lecturer

Linda is a PhD candidate at the University of Otago. She received her BA in Asian Languages and Cultures from Ca'Foscari University in Venice, and her MA in Religious Studies from Padua University (Italy). Her PhD dissertation focuses on the negotiation of Jesuit identity in Japan, in relation with Europe and Asia, at the end of the sixteenth century. Her other interests include Jesuit masculinity and Orientalism in Science Fiction. Linda has taught history of Christianity and Orientalism in Western representations of Asian religions.

## Contact details

Email [linda.zampol.dortia@otago.ac.nz](mailto:linda.zampol.dortia@otago.ac.nz)

## Course coordinator

Will Sweetman is Senior Lecturer in Asian Religions at Otago. He studied Religious Studies and Philosophy at Lancaster University, and Philosophy of Religion at the University of Cambridge. He has taught at universities in London and Newcastle, and held research fellowships at the University of Halle (Germany) and the University of Cambridge. His primary field of research is the encounter between Asian religions and the West in the modern period, and in particular the study of Hinduism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He is currently working on writings on Hinduism by two groups of European missionaries (German Lutherans and French Jesuits) in south India in the eighteenth century. As well as this paper,

<sup>1</sup>Abbreviations are marked by an ellipsis [...].

he also teaches an introductory paper on Hinduism and Buddhism, and papers on Religion in South India, Asian Religions and the West, and Theories of Religion.

### Will's contact details

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 Office hours: Tuesday 11am and Friday 10am

## Assessment overview

### Assessment for RELS 310

There are three components in the assessment for this paper:

- an essay outline (5%)
- a 2,500-word essay (35%)
- a three-hour examination (60%)

#### 1. Essay outline (5%)

For the first assignment you should choose one of the questions below as the title for an essay. The outline should be no longer than two pages (max. 500 words) and include:

- headings and subheadings, to show what topics you will cover
- a brief indication of the anticipated conclusion
- at least *three* of the works you intend to consult.

The outline is intended to assist you in the process of writing a good essay. Your final essay need not be identical with what you present on your outline, if I suggest (or you choose) another approach to the topic.

The deadline for the essay outline is 5pm on Friday the **2nd of September**. No extensions will be granted for this assignment.

#### 2. Essay (35%)

For the second assignment you should choose one of the questions below as the title for a 2,500-word essay. You are not expected to adapt or replace the title of the essay (as is usual in some universities). Any alteration to the title of the essay *must* be negotiated with me.

Guidelines for presentation of essays are available from the Religious Studies office, or through Blackboard, where you will also find further advice on study skills, including the University's policies on plagiarism and advice on how to avoid it.

The deadline for the essay is 5pm on Friday the **23rd of September**. No requests for extensions will be entertained after Friday the 16th of September.

Choose one of the following as the title for your essay:



1. 'We have become Chinese so that we may gain the Chinese for Christ' (Michele Ruggieri). Explain the reasons for and the consequences of the Jesuits' missionary strategy of "accommodation."
2. 'Islam was thus Europe's "other" in a way that China or India or (after 1492) the indigenous states of the New World could never be.' Zachary Lockman  
Why?
3. 'The continuation of misconceptions and misinterpretations about the veil and veiled women has several consequences, not just for Muslim women but also for occidental women.' Homa Hoodfar  
Discuss.
4. Does Orientalism persist in contemporary Western science-fiction movies?
5. How has the spread of Asian religions beyond Asia in the twentieth century affected European perceptions of these traditions?

### 3. Examination (60%)

In the examination you will be required to answer three questions, one from each of three sections. The date for the examination will be sent to you as soon as it has been set by the Registry. All arrangements for examinations are handled by the Examinations Office. The date and venue for the examination will be posted in your eVision calendar as soon as it has been set by the Examinations Office. Past exam papers for this course are available from the library.

### Assessment for RELS 462

Assessment for this paper consists of two written assignments (each 50%).

#### Assignment 1 (50%)

For the first assignment you should choose one of the following topics as the title for a 5,000-word essay.

1. 'Hinduism was of necessity effeminate because it was degraded, and degraded because it was effeminate' Thomas Metcalf  
Explain the prevalence of feminine tropes in European writing on Asian religions.
2. 'Arguably, categories in which the East has been understood cannot be uncoupled from the more over instruments of colonial oppression.' J. J. Clarke  
Discuss.

3. 'The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the cultures, institutions, and political ambience of the representer.' Edward Said  
How then are we to judge European representations of Asian Religions?
4. Is the idea that Asian religions are more sensitive than others to the natural environment merely a variation on older Orientalist themes?
5. Discuss the presence, in Western movies, of elements inspired or borrowed from the "Orient," which have been presented without any connection to their original culture or religion.
6. Does the conceptualization of the Orient have any meaning beyond its role as the "Other" of the West?

The deadline for the first essay is 5pm on Friday the **2nd of September**.

### Assignment 2 (50%)

For the second assignment you will be asked to develop, in consultation with me, a title for a second 5,000-word essay. The deadline for the second essay is 5pm on Friday the **30th of September**.

### Submitting assignments

Assignments should be submitted **electronically** via Blackboard by 5.00pm on the due dates notified. They are **not** to be given directly or emailed to your course coordinator.

Please be aware that Safe Assign will be used on essay assignments. Safe Assign is a plagiarism detection tool which can report matches between sections of students' work submitted to it and material on a comprehensive database to which Safe Assign has access. This includes material on the internet and other students' assignments which have previously been submitted to Safe Assign.

Essays will need to be submitted to the Final Version Assignment folder in the Blackboard course for this paper. You may submit your essay to this folder only once.

You also have the option of submitting one *draft* assignment to the 'Draft Safe Assignment' folder. If you choose to utilise this option, you will receive the report generated which contains an indication of the proportion of your essay which matches other sources. Assignments submitted to the 'Draft Assignment' folder will *not* be assessed; however the report will be available for the paper co-ordinator to view.

You can find further information on Safe Assign and dishonest practice at: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/blackboard/assessing-your-students/anti-plagiarism-safeassign/anti-plagiarism/> and <http://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/policies/otagon16850.html>.

## Deadlines and extensions

Assignments must be received by the Department no later than the stated due date. In highly exceptional, unforeseen circumstances (such as sickness), an extension may be granted. But please note that poor time management, or time pressures caused by your employment or by other issues are *not* sufficient reasons for granting an extension. All students are very busy, and everyone needs to find time to fit in assignment work. Granting extensions to some students on the basis of busy lives is unfair to students who manage these issues. This policy therefore seeks to be fair to all students.

If you need to apply for an extension, please email the course coordinator (Will Sweetman) or the departmental administrator ([religion@otago.ac.nz](mailto:religion@otago.ac.nz)) well in advance of the due date. If an extension is obtained on medical grounds, a doctor's certificate should be attached to the assignment when it is submitted.

Assignments received after these dates will incur penalties of 5% of the marks available for the assignment for each week day that it is late. Where an extension has been obtained from the course coordinator there will be no penalty for late submission, provided that the new deadline is met. If the new deadline is not met or an assignment is submitted after the due date without an extension having been obtained, the grade awarded for the assignment will be reduced at the rate of 5% of the marks available for the assignment for each week day the assignment is late. Staff will show the grade that the assignment would have been awarded had it been submitted on time and then deduct the penalty.

## Resources

A comprehensive list of advice about the Religion programme is available and regularly updated on our website at: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/religion/courses/resources.html>. This includes information on how to use Blackboard and Zoom, how to format and submit assignments, and where to find help. It is important that you review this information!