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**World Religions in Sociological Perspective**

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本科生    硕士生    博士生

Undergraduate    Master    Doctoral student

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English

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Basic information of the world religions

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Lectures and discussions

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Attendance and participation 20%  
assignment and mini-papers 80%

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2 credits

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Dr. Lili Zhang received the PhD in Comparative literature at Emory University. Currently she teaches comparative religion as associate professor at Texas Wesleyan University. Dr. Zhang has published books and articles about history of religions, religious experience and practice, and Chan and Daoism. Recently, Dr. Zhang was also engaged in the production of the documentary films on religion.

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This course is to examine the concept of religion and introduce comparative religions in a critical fashion. The course begins with the critique of the phenomenological methodology employed in most of survey textbooks of world religions in the Western universities, unfolding the hidden assumption of this methodology that religion is sui generis in the Western society and demonstrating how this essentialistic understanding of religion was constructed by the West with the reference to the role of Christianity had played in their own history, hence no universal value. In contrast to the Western concept of religion, this course will introduce historical concept of religion, that is, religion is a historical product, having different teachings, practices and functions in different historical stages and different societies. Taking the major religions in the world as case studies, the course will show how these religions emerged with different characteristics in different stages of the human evolution. Through analysing world religions in their historical context, this course is expected to foster students’ capacity of critical thinking, which will great facilitate their own understanding religious phenomenon in the society and their academic research in the humanity area.

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION：  
 1.1 Introduction to the course  
 1.2 Definition of Religion   
Questions and assignment:  
1. Is religion sui generis or a second order?  
2. Is the pursuit for the Ultimate Reality universal to human beings?   
3. Has religion ever existed or never existed?  
  
CHAPTER TWO: METHOLOGIES OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES   
 2.1 Religion in the context of the West  
 2.2 An overview of methodologies of comparative religion in the West  
 2.3 Seven theories of religion   
Questions and assignment:  
1. What is modernity? What is secularization?  
2. How was religion concerned in the Western society in the past and the present?  
3. What are theories of religion in the West?  
4. What are the methodologies for comparative religion?  
  
CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL APPRAOCH TO THE WORLD RELIGIONS  
3.1 Critical philosophy in Kant  
3.2 Discourses, Body and Power in Foucault    
3.3 The construction of the concept of world religions in the West  
3.4 Critical terms for religious studies: myth, sacredness, rituals, and religious experiences  
Questions and assignment  
1. What is called “being critical”?  
 2. How to translate the verb “to be” into Chinese?  
  
CHAPTER FOUR: TRIBAL RELIGIONS: HINDUISM AND JUDAISM  
 4.1 The characteristics of the tribal society  
4.2 The beginning of Hinduism  
4.3 The beginning of Judaism  
Due first minipaper    
With which methodology and position of comparative religion would you agree? Why?   
  
CHAPTER FIVE: ARCHAIC RELIGION: SIDDHARTHA GUARTAMA AND JESUS  
 5.1 Stepping out of the tribal society   
 5.2 The story of the Buddha: the Emergence of Buddhism  
 5.3 The story of Jesus: the Emergence of Christianity  
 Question and assignment:  
1. Compare the story of the Buddha with that of Jesus. Why did they have similarities in major  scenarios in their life stages?  
2. In which ways do you find the Buddha’s teachings resemble Jesus’s teachings?   
  
CHAPTER SIX: FEUDAL RELIGION: BUDDHISM IN SOUTHASIA, CATHOLICISM AND    ISLAM   
 6.1 What is Feudalism?  
 6.2 Buddhism in power   
 6.3 Catholicism in power  
 6.4 Islam in power  
Question and assignment:   
How would these religions, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, be selected to serve the political power respectively in their own society?  
  
CHAPTER SEVEN: MODERN RELIGION: PROTESTANTISM AND RELIGIONS IN       AMERICA    
7.1 What happened in the West since the Renaissance?  
 7.2 Arising of Protestantism   
 7.3 Religions in America  
Due second minipaper:  
Discuss how social conditions determined the evolution of forms of religion through the case studies of the Abrahamic traditions and religions of India  
  
CHAPTER EIGHT: RELIGIONS OF CHINA  
 8.1 Pre-Han Chinese history   
 8.2 Confucianism  
 8.3 Daoism  
 8.4 The Folk Religion  
 8.5 Chinese Buddhism   
Question and assignment:  
1. Would China and the West be in a close, if not the same, pace in the evolution of the societies?  
2. What kind of vision of the society would Confucianism and Daoism respectively have?  
3. What could you learn about Chinese society from the phenomena of Chinese folk religion?  
4. How did Chinese Buddhism get crossed with Chinese indigenous religions?    
   
CHAPTER NINE CONCLUDING REMARKS:  
 9.1 What on the earth is religion?   
9.2 The historical baggage in the Western concept of religion  
 9.3 How would a Chinese understand religion?  
Due third minipaper：  
What would religion be understood differently in the West and in China?

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Printout of PPT files for all the lectures will be made available in the very beginning of class.  
  
Bellah, Robert N. Religion in Human Evolution (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011)  
Foltz, Richard. Religions of the Silk Road, 2nd edition (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)  
Kurtz, Lester R. Gods in the Global Village: The World Religions in Sociological Perspective (London: Sage Publications, 2014)

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Laine, James, W. Meta-Religion: Religion and Power in World History (University of California Press, 2014)   
Masuzawa, Tomoko. The Invention of World Religions (The University of Chicago Press, 2005)  
 --In Search of Dreamtime (The University of Chicago Press, 1993)  
McCutcheon, Russell T. Studying Religion (London: Equinox, 2007)  
Turner, Bryan S. Religion and Social Theory, 2nd edition (London: Sage Publications, 1991)  
 --The Religious and the Political: A Comparative Sociology of Religion (Cambridge University Press, 2013)  
Taylor, Mark C.(ed). Critical Terms for Religious Studies (The University of Chicago Press, 1998)

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