

# Introduction to Eastern Philosophy

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## **Course Description**

Introduction to Eastern Philosophy intends to present students with a variety of important philosophical systems of thought and practice over the past three thousand years of Asian history. We will encounter and examine the philosophic worldviews of Shamanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Shinto both in historical development and in our present world. The significant questions of what is reality, life, death, human nature and ethics in each system will be explored. Students will be analyzing and gaining an understanding of these philosophies through the analytic close-reading of primary texts and through investigations of the art, the music, the meditative practices and the social life of these related though divergent systems of perceiving and acting in the world. Students will express their insights in reflective and expository writing, discussion and through furthering their own interests and understanding through research.

## **Course Topics**

### **What is Philosophy in the West and in the East?**

General introduction to the course, the materials and initial concepts

### **Early Worldviews: Shamanism**

Paleolithic and then Neolithic worldviews and practices in Asia. Siberian shamanism as an example.

### **Early Development of Hinduism**

Deities, Powers and Yogas

### **Later Development of Hinduism**

Perceptions of reality: the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita

### **Early Buddhism: Theravada and Hinayana**

Buddha: perceptions of reality and early practices

### **Mahayana Buddhism**

Expansion of Buddhist thought and practice

### **Vajrayana Buddhism**

Tantric Hinduism and Buddhism and the Buddhist encounter with indigenous worldviews in Tibet

### **Confucius and the Hundred Schools of Thought**

Philosophies attempt to create a stable society

### **Taoism: Lao Tzu and the Tao Teh Ching**

A way to live and its power

### **Taoism: Chuang Tzu**

The wisdom of the absurd

### **Chan Buddhism: Taoism and Mahayana combine**

Focus on Tang and Sung Dynasty China

### **Zen in Japan**

Contrasting approaches Soto and Rinzai Zen

### **Shinto in Japan**

Return to place in philosophy

### **Student Presentations**

Major student research is presented and then discussed by class

### **Final Exam**

## **Material and Assignments**

There will be few exams, three substantial essays, a large research project and a presentation of that research as a final exam this semester.

You need to keep a journal for this class of notes and responses. It is one way for you to express and the instructor to assess your knowledge and thinking about the topics encountered. It should be a three ring notebook or section in a notebook where you can also keep your copies of the class handouts, which will be numerous.

Classroom discussion is a central element in this course. To share your astute insights and ask important questions is of crucial value in the class. Patience and listening skills are vital.

## **Evaluation**

Your final grade will come from:

- 30%** Essays
- 30%** Research project & presentation
- 20 %** Journal
- 10%** Exams
- 10%** In class participation and discussion

## **Practices**

I hope you feel welcome in this class and help make others feel welcome too. It should be an intriguing study – we will be encountering some serious issues. I hope you have a positive, rewarding and even exciting time this semester in our class. If not, please let me know. Never hesitate to talk with me before or after class, during office hours or any other time we can arrange. My email is at the top of this syllabus for you to use.

Philosophy is a hot and sometimes very heated subject. Participation in our study needs to be warm but we are seeking light rather than heat.

Always remember: understanding something is not necessarily agreeing with it. With this in mind, our primary rule in class is: *Everyone, everything treated with RESPECT.*

Out of this comes the following common sense practices:

- No personal put downs or purposefully hurtful comments.
- You can sit next to who you want to unless you get distracted.
- Do not disrupt the class. Comments on topic are cool – conversations off to the side and random comments are not.
- No one should have to raise their voice to be heard.
- Take care of the room and of each other.

Another way of mutual respect is to come to class prepared.

- This means come to class with your notebook, a blue or black pen, your homework and homework log.
- It also means go to the bathroom, eat snacks and get a drink before or after class. Our time together is limited and leaving the class will be disruptive and will often mean missing something important.