



A Journey to the East

Teachings from the East

Course Description/Handbook | Liberal Arts: Cairo Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences | Spring

Course Description

This course is an opportunity to introduce ourselves to and explore various ideas from Eastern cultures (such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Sufism, and perhaps aspects of Ancient Mesopotamia/Akkadian).

The structure of the course will first look at the 'historical' narratives of such figures as Buddha, Confucius, and Rumi, and then explore ideas and principles as have been articulated/manifested through art.

Themes that will be explored are the i) principles behind *Buddhist teachings*, ii) Confucian *humanism*, and the attitudes of (*Islamic*) mysticism.

This approach will cover two thirds of the course; for the tail-end of the course, the idea is to explore a specific formulation (and perhaps rather esoteric expression) of said cultures: for example, the *Mādhyamaka* (*Middle Way*) school of thought from Buddhism and the notion of *emptiness* (*śūnyatā*); a conversation around Confucius' *ethical* and *political* views through his *Analects*; a read of Rumi's *Masnavi* or Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*.

Alternatively, students may choose to turn to Ancient Mesopotamia, to look at the history and (cultural) attitudes revolving around the recovery of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Or they may like to introduce another culture and discuss its cultural artifact/artistic manifestation (literature, painting/drawing, statute, etc.).

Weekly Sessions

Week 1: *The Legend of the Buddha Shakyamuni – A Contextual Introductory Buddhism and the life of the ‘historical Buddha’*

Reading

Radice, B. ed. (1959) *Buddhist Scripture*. Translated by Edward Conze. Hamondsworth: Penguin Books.

Genius of the Ancient World. Episode 1. *Buddha*. 2015. BBC 4. 5 th August. 21.00.

Week 2: *The Dharma (Buddha’s Teaching) – Key Themes in Buddhist Teachings*

Reading

Cush, D., (1993) *Buddhism*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Radice, B. ed. (1959) *Buddhist Scripture*. Translated by Edward Conze. Hamondsworth: Penguin Books.

Week 3: *Wheel of Life (Bhavacankra) – The Story/Teaching Behind the Diagram*

Reading

None: we will be looking at *Wheel of Life (Bhavacankra)* to discuss the Buddhist ideas are depicted through it.

Maybe also look at:

a few verses from *The Dhammapada* [Easwaran, E., trans. (2003) *The Dhammapada*. California: Nilgiri Press.]

and *The Questions of King Milinda* [Davis, T. W. trans. (1982) *The Questions of King Milinda*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Press)]

Week 4: *Confucius – Confucius’ Life and Vision*

Reading

Genius of the Ancient World. Episode 3. *Confucius*. 2015. BBC 4. 19 th August. 21.00.

Oldstone-Moore, J. (2003) *Understanding Confucianism*. London: Duncan Baird Publishers.

Confucius, (2014) *The Analects*. Trans. Annping Chin. London: Penguin.

Week 5: *Confucius’ Humanism (part I) – Exploring/Understanding Confucianism*

Reading

Oldstone-Moore, J. (2003) *Understanding Confucianism*. London: Duncan Baird Publishers.

Confucius, (2014) *The Analects*. Trans. Annping Chin. London: Penguin.

Week 6: *Confucius’ Humanism (part II) – Confucian Humanism Through Poetry*

Reading

Po, L. and Fu, T. (1973) *Li Po and Tu Fu*. Translated by Arthur Cooper. London: Penguin Books.

Yang, M. V. (2002) ‘Man and Nature: A Study of Du Fu’s Poetry’, *Monumenta Serica*, 50, pp. 315-336.

[There is the potential to explore ideas from *Taoism* and the work of Lao Tzu; this will have to be discussed in advanced as it would change the shape of the following sessions].

Week 7: *Rumi & Sufism – A Glimpse into the Experience of Mystical Love*

Reading

Lewis, F. D. (2000) *Rumi Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalâl al-Din Rumi*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

Burckhardt, T., (2008) *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom.

Schimmel, A (1988) 'Mystical Poetry in Islam: The Case of Maulana Jalaladdin Rumi'. *Religion & Literature*, 20(1), pp. 67-80.

Week 8: *Rumi – The Poet as a Thinker*

Reading

Iqbal, A. (1983) *The Life and Work of Jalal-ud-din Rumi*. London: Octagon.

Burckhardt, T., (2008) *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom.

Rumi, J. (1999) *Rumi: Selected Poems*. Translated by Coleman Banks. London: Penguin Books.

Week 9: *Rumi's Verses – 'The Universal Voice of the Human Soul'*

Reading

Rumi, J. (1999) *Rumi: Selected Poems*. Translated by Coleman Banks. London: Penguin Books.

Baldock, J. (2004) *The Essence of Sufism*. Royston: Eagle Editions.

Iqbal, A. (1983) *The Life and Work of Jalal-ud-din Rumi*. London: Octagon.

Schimmel, A (1988) 'Mystical Poetry in Islam: The Case of Maulana Jalaladdin Rumi'. *Religion & Literature*, 20(1), pp. 67-80.

Rest of the Course:

The idea would be to look deeper at specific manifestations of the traditions explored so far.

Avenues to be explored include:

- i) The *Mādhyamaka* (*Middle Way*) school of thought from Buddhism and the notion of *emptiness* (*śūnyatā*).
 - Nāgārjuna, 2013. *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way*. Translated by M. Siderits & S. Katsura. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.
- ii) A conversation around Confucius' *ethical* and *political* views through his *Analects*.
 - Confucius, (2014) *The Analects*. Trans. Annping Chin. London: Penguin.
- iii) A read of Rumi's *Masnavi* or Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*.
 - Rūmī, J. a.-D., 2004. *The Masnavi - Book One*. Translated by J. Mojaddedi. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - Attar, F. (2011) *The Conference of the Birds*. Translated by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis. London: Penguin Books

The above can either be all included, one each week, or students can elect one of the above to focus in length (close reading). In so doing, either students will be introduced to and discuss ideas from various traditions or get acquainted with the academic skill of *close reading*.

Alternatively, students may opt to explore a different tradition/way of thinking from the East, such as looking at the history and (cultural) attitudes revolving around the recovery of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; this last, however, will be more of an encyclopedic approach rather than the more *disciplined* examples above.