

# Rel 321: Religion and Ecology in Asia

Professor Luke Whitmore  
(CCC 417, lwhitmor@uwsp.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesday 3:30-5:30, Wednesday 1:30-2:30 and by appointment.

## Description

What ideas, beliefs, practices, experiences, and strategies do religious traditions prominently connected to Asia offer that could be understood as *ecological*? What can we learn from such resources? Under what conditions, if any, are these religious ecological resources mobilized in ways that combat environmental degradation? Are these the best possible questions to ask about the relationship of “religion” and “ecology”? This class seeks to explore these questions by first developing a conceptual framework for thinking about the intersection of “ecology” and “religion” and then applying that framework to the consideration of specific Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, Muslim, Hindu, and possibly Shinto examples.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course you will be able to:

- Identify connections between specific Asian religious ideas and practices and specific ecological ideas
- Evaluate in a preliminary way the real-world ecological utility of specific Asian religious ideas and practices

## Orienting Questions

- What are the arguments and to whom are those arguments directed?
- What kinds of data are being considered and why those kinds of data?
- What approaches are being used to analyze those data and why those approaches?
- What operative understandings and/or definitions of “ecology”, “ecological”, “religion”, “religious”, “spiritual”, and “spirituality” are present?
- What understandings are present about the connections of “religion”, “ecology”, and “environmental degradation”?
- Of those understandings, which do you think are “useful” or “hopeful”, and why? Which do you think are problematic, and why?

## Assessments and Requirements

Participation and Preparedness: 15%. This class will do much of its work through seminar-style conversation. Your active preparation and participation are essential.

Weekly in-class mini-essays: 15%. These are short -- about two paragraphs. They should always be divided into two labelled sections: 1) summary and 2) analysis. You are required to complete a mini-essay 10 times during the semester and most classes we will ***begin class*** with about 15 minutes for you to do the writing. At the end of the semester you will pick what you feel are four best efforts and submit them for a grade. I will, however, not grade the four unless all ten have been completed. As long as a serious and thoughtful effort is made in the preparation of these mini-essays I will grade them very generously because the goal is simply to help everyone to be fully prepared for our conversations. These mini-essays should be 99% in your own words.

Attendance: 5%. Everyone is automatically entitled to two unexcused absences. Anything beyond this should be discussed with me and will impact your final grade. If you miss more than 4 classes we will need to meet in person to discuss how class is going. Your presence and participation matter. Please place a copy of any absence-related information (including emails to me) in the Absence-Related Info Dropbox on D2L.

Unit 1 Take-Home Test: 15% (term definitions and short answers)

Unit 2 Essay: 20% (800-1000 words)

Book Report: 15 % (approx. 800 words)

Final Essay: 15% (approx. 827 words)

## Texts for Purchase:

*Ecology and Religion* by John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker (Island Press, 2014).  
ISBN: 9781597267083

*The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh. (Mariner, 2006). ISBN: 978-0618711666. Other paperback editions are fine.

## Written Assignments

If you are not able to turn in on time due to particularly extenuating circumstances, some flexibility may be possible. If this is the case, you must have asked and received permission from me no later than the day before the assignment is due. Without permission, a grade penalty will be assigned at my discretion or I may not allow you to submit.

## Required Readings

If I do not provide photocopies of an assigned reading not in one of our books, you must print out the reading (you will find PDF versions on our D2L site) and bring to class.

## Smart Phones

Please do not use a smart phone in class without permission. Tablets or laptops for the purposes of note-taking are fine, with permission. If your smart phone use is causing our collective energy to decrease I will let you know. If it continues to be an issue it will impact your grade.

## Assignments

Assignments will change. Be sure to check D2L before each assignment.

## Learning Accommodations

UWSP is committed to providing reasonable and appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities and temporary impairments. If you have a disability or acquire a condition during the semester where you need assistance, please contact the Disability and Assistive Technology Center on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of Albertson Hall (library) as soon as possible. DATC can be reached at 715-346-3365 or DATC@uwsp.edu. <https://www.uwsp.edu/disability/Pages/default.aspx>

## Mutual Respect (avoid bad *karmas*)

<https://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf>

## Academic Misconduct (avoid bad *karmas*)

<http://library.uwsp.edu/guides/vrd/plagiarism.htm>

<https://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf#page=11>

## Percentage to Letter Grade Conversion

A: 94-100, A-: 90-93, B+: 87-89, B: 83-86, B-: 80-82, C+: 77-79, C: 73-76, C-: 70-72, D+: 67-69, D: 65-66, F: 64 or lower

## Emergency Response Guidance:

- In the event of a medical emergency call 9-1-1 or use the Red Emergency Phone outside of CCC Room 227 (located near the middle of each of the two long hallways on this floor). Offer assistance if trained and willing to do so. Guide emergency responders to victim.

- In the event of a tornado warning, proceed to the lowest level interior room without window exposure. Our classroom is one of these designated rooms.
- In the event of a fire alarm, evacuate the building in a calm manner. Meet in the middle of Parking Lot E (the parking lot between CCC and NFAC).
- Active Shooter/Code React – Run/Escape, Hide, Fight. If trapped hide, lock doors, turn off lights, spread out and remain quiet. Call 9-1-1 when it is safe to do so. Follow instructions of emergency responders. See UW-Stevens Point Emergency Procedures at [www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures](http://www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures) for details on all emergency response at UW-Stevens Point.”

# Schedule of Assignments

## Unit 1: "Religion" and "Ecology"

### Week 1

Wednesday, September 6: Beginnings

### Week 2

Wednesday, September 13

- *Ecology and Religion* 1-28 (Introduction and Chapter 1). This should be read carefully, with notes and outlining.
- Question to Think about: How would you apply the Ecology and Religion reading to the Forest Monk video example?:  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2010/01/15/january-15-2010-forest-monks/5472/>
- Fill out the About Me document on D2L and upload it to the About Me dropbox.

### Week 3

Wednesday, September 20:

- *Ecology and Religion* 29-42 (Chapter 2) and 43-61 (Chapter 3). This should be read carefully, with notes and outlining.
- Question to Think about: How would you apply the Ecology and Religion reading to the short web article about Masanaobu Fukuoka: <http://www.trentbrown.in/buddhism-and-agriculture-the-philosophy-of-masanobu-fukuoka/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQOG-dBsgzQ>

### Week 4

Wednesday, September 27

- *Ecology and Religion* 61-84 (Chapter 4), 85-95 (Chapter 5). This should be read carefully, with notes and outlining.
- Question to Think about: How would you apply the Ecology and Religion reading to the short web article about Dhammic Socialism?:  
○ <http://www.liberationpark.org/bpf/dsocial.htm>

## Week 5

### Wednesday, October 4

- **“Principles and Poetry, Places and Stories: The Resources of Buddhist Ecology” by Donald Swearer (PDF on D2L)**
- **Work on Take-Home Test**

## Unit 2: Regions and Case Studies

### Week 6

#### Wednesday, October 11: Buddhism 2

- **Take-Home Test Due.**
- **Continued Engagement with Buddhism**
- **Class attendance on this day will materially affect your overall class grade.**

### Week 7

#### Wednesday, October 18: Buddhism 3

- Selections from *Dharma Rain* (PDF on D2L and handout in class, extra handouts available outside CCC 417).

### Week 8

#### Wednesday, October 25: Indonesia

- “Tradition and Sentiment in Indonesian Islam” (PDF on D2L)
- “Introduction to Islam” (all short essays): <http://pluralism.org/religions/islam/introduction-to-islam/>
- Check out the Vimeo website for Green Islam in Indonesia (<https://vimeo.com/hijau>) and send me an email indicating which video(s) you think we should discuss in class.

## Week 9

- Wednesday, November 1: China
- *Ecology and Religion: Chapter 7: Confucianism as Grounding in Community*
- The Chinese Cosmos: The Basic Concepts:
  - <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/cosmos/bgov/cosmos.htm>
- The first nine-segments of *Classical Feng Shui: Harnessing Nature’s Subtle Forces* (available through Films on Demand, which can be found through the UWSP library’s web site)
- “Daoism and Ecology” by James Miller
  - <http://fore.yale.edu/religion/daoism/>
- The Dao of Cow:
  - <http://pages.ucsd.edu/~dkjordan/chin/LaoJuang/DawOfCow.html>
- “Why China will solve the world’s environmental problems” by James Miller:
  - <http://www.sustainablechina.info/2014/05/12/why-china-will-solve-the-worlds/>

## Week 10

Wednesday, November 8: South Asia

- Ecology and Religion Chapter 9
- "Hinduism, Jainism, and Ecology" by Chapple
  - <http://fore.yale.edu/religion/hinduism/>
- Begin Hungry Tide
  - Begin Hungry Tide 1-63 (end of "Boat" chapter)

## Week 11

Wednesday, November 15

- Hungry Tide: 64-146 (end of "Pursued" chapter and Part 1)
- Unit 2 Essay Handed Out
- *Work on your book*

## Week 12

- **Wednesday, November 22: AAR => Virtual class. Unit 2 Essay due on Unit 2 by 5 PM.**
- *Work on your book*

## Unit 3: Explorations

## Week 13

Wednesday, November 29

- Hungry Tide 146-243 (end of "A Killing")
- "Ethical and Religious Dimensions of Chipko Resistance" by George A. James (PDF on D2L)
- *Work on your book*

## Week 14

- Wednesday, December 6:
- Hungry Tide: 244-334 (to end of book)
- "Sustainability" by Willis Jenkins (PDF on D2L)
- *Work on your book*

## Week 15

- Wednesday, December 13:
- Book Report Oral Presentations
- Discussion of Final Projects
- Closing Conversation
- *Finish working on your book*

- *Turn in journals.*

FINAL ESSAY DUE DURING FINALS PERIOD.