

Beyond Orientalism: Studying “Asia” and the “West”



HUMN 270 • Section 01 • CRN: 54745 • Comparative Humanities
Spring 2011 • TR 8:30–9:52 am • BIOL 221
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Office hours: W 10:00–12:00, or by appointment • Marts 3C

Asian and European cultures have been in contact and conflict for several thousand years, but the frequency and intimacy of such contacts have increased dramatically over the past century, by virtue of the increasing spread of peoples and information that characterizes modern “globalization.” This process has generated, in its wake, new endeavors in cross-cultural inquiry and comparison, which find various manifestations in the social sciences, humanities and the creative arts. These endeavors are rooted in the attempt to provide shape to forms of cultural identity, often constructed on a duality of “us” and “them.” A catchphrase often employed to describe the modern interpretation (and exploitation) of Asia by the West is “orientalism,” first introduced to the academic lexicon by Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said in his groundbreaking 1978 work of the same name. In the three decades since the publication of Said’s work, scholars have analysed both the strength and limits of Said’s thesis, and by the early twenty-first century it can be said that we have to some extent gone “beyond orientalism” as an interpretive framework for studying the historical interactions of Asia and the West.

This seminar is dedicated to an analysis of methods of comparative study as well as the very concept of “comparison” as a scholarly and humanistic practice. We will focus attention on the way that both “Asia” and the “West” have been conceptualized from the ancient and medieval periods through the early modern period and extending to the present. We will study the various ways in which Western explorers, scholars, missionaries, artists and poets have conceptualized Asia as a unit and in its diversity. We will also explore the other side of the coin: the conceptualization and interpretation of the “West” by Westerners and Asians alike. The primary objective of this seminar is to have students engage critically with various methods of comparative study by focusing on the historical meeting of Asia and the West as conceived and interpreted by Westerners and Asians. Students will be expected to engage receptively and critically with various key texts and works of art from the period under consideration. This is an *interactive* course; you will be asked to respond and engage with the course material, and with the ideas and opinions of the instructor and other students—though, it is hoped, always in a civil and polite fashion. Evaluation for the course will be based largely on the demonstration of both oral and written critical engagement with course material.

Readings:

Books: 1) Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979)

2) Spence, Jonathan D., *The Chan’s Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (Norton, 1998)

All other readings can be found as pdf files on Moodle

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory. Since this course requires significant student interaction and discussion, it is absolutely necessary for you to attend each and every class. Only sickness with a note is considered a valid excuse. Each absence without excuse will result in a 2-point deduction from the participation grade. Being late without an excuse will count as half an absence, thus a 1-point deduction. Five absences without a note will result in automatic failure.

2. PARTICIPATION

30%

Class participation, including discussion of readings and questions posed in class and on Moodle, is a requirement. Participation is a matter of quality not quantity. You do not have to speak every class, but rather show that you have done the readings and are willing and able to engage, in a thoughtful way, with the topics under discussion. Good questions are also an important aspect of participation (see next requirement).

3. READING QUESTIONS (RQs)

10%

For each and every reading, all students will be asked to submit at least one question for discussion. Questions must be submitted by midnight on the evening before the class in which the reading will be discussed. The instructor will choose the best questions and we will use these as a basis for class discussion. At the end of the term, each student will be evaluated on the basis of how many of their questions were chosen for use in class.

3. ENGAGEMENT PIECES (EPs)

10% x 3= 30%

A large part of this course will be devoted to writing, understood as a *process* rather than simply a *means* of communication. In order to achieve this, we will be employing methods of *exploratory* writing, i.e., writing that is itself part of the process of developing one's thoughts and arguments. Each student will be required to write a total of three 1500-word "engagement pieces," in response to a major issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student's ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean "negatively"). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). You will have the opportunity to hand in drafts of your work, and will receive written and oral feedback. As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

4. FINAL TAKE HOME EXAM

30%

Final take home exam, to be assigned on the last day of class. You will have one week to complete the exam. All questions will be in essay format, and you will have some choice.

CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS (the fine print):

- All written work is to be submitted electronically as an MS Word file with a ".doc" or ".docx" suffix and your last name in the filename; e.g., Smith-EP1(d) ['d' for draft; 'f' for final version]. This is for two reasons: 1) my comments will be much more legible if I type them; and 2) once or twice in the semester I will submit your work to Turnitin.com to check for academic dishonesty. If you hand in work that is not your own, expect my best effort to have you disciplined to the fullest extent possible.
- Note taking on laptops is NOT permitted. Cell phones are to be turned off BEFORE EACH CLASS.
- Extensions for the essay will be readily granted, provided that you ask me *at least a week in advance*. After that point, they will be granted *very* selectively, usually only for medical reasons.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS

I. Beyond Orientalism: Issues & Debates

Wk 1	1/20	Course Introduction	
Wk 2	1/25–1/27	Understanding <i>Orientalism</i>	Said, <i>Orientalism</i>
Wk 3	2/1–2/3*	Limits of <i>Orientalism</i>	Clifford; Clarke; Warraq

II. Inventing Asia, Inventing the West

Wk 4	2/8–2/10 [§]	From Alexander to Marco Polo	Herodotus; Polo; Mandeville
Wk 5	2/15–2/17 [†]	Asia in the Age of Discovery	Hakluyt; Dryden
Wk 6	2/22–2/24*	Oriental Enlightenment	Clarke; App; Montesquieu
Wk 7	3/1–3/3 [§]	Romantic Reveries	Coleridge; Fitzgerald; Loti
Wk 8	3/8–3/10 [†]	Asia in 20 th Century Western Film	TBA
Wk 9	3/15–3/17	SPRING BREAK	

III. The West from Asian Eyes

Wk 10	3/22–3/24*	China: Barbarians at the Gates	<i>Renditions</i> 1 & 2
Wk 11	3/29–3/31 [§]	China: Barbarians at the Gates II	<i>Renditions</i> 3; An Chong
Wk 12	4/5–4/7 [†]	Japan: Christian Martyrs and Black Ships	Fukuzawa; Duus; Keene
Wk 13	4/12–4/14	India: Overcoming the Raj	Tagore; Gandhi; Nehru

IV. The Future of Asia and the West

Wk 14	4/19–4/21	The Asian Mystique	Prasso; Iwamura
Wk 15	4/26–4/28	The Asian Century?	Clarke
Wk 16	5/3 ^{THX}	Conclusions	

CODE: * = EP ASSIGNED § = EP DRAFT DUE † = EP FINAL DUE THX = TAKE HOME EXAM ASSIGNED

*O.K., East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face,
tho' they come from the ends of the earth!*
– Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West," 1889

GRADING POLICIES

In grading all written assignments I ask the following questions:

1. Does the paper have a thesis?
2. Is the thesis interesting / relevant to the course?
3. Is the paper free from long quotations / excessive borrowing of ideas?
4. Is the paper reasonably well written (i.e., sentence structure, grammar, spelling)?
5. Is it long enough / not too long?

If the answer to any of the above is 'no', the paper will receive a 'C' grade of some form. If the answer to more than two of the above is 'no', the paper will receive a 'D' grade. If all of the above are answered by 'yes', the following additional questions apply:

6. How thoughtful / original is the paper?
7. How well organized is the paper? Does it have a conclusion?
8. Is the style efficient, not wordy or unclear?
9. Does the writing betray any special elegance?
10. Does the paper go 'beyond' the course material to explore other possibilities?

Depending on the answers to these questions, the paper will receive some form of A or B grade.

Grading for the Take Home Exam will be based on your knowledge of the material, as well as your ability to clearly and succinctly respond to significant issues and problems raised in the course.

How to do well in this course? Here are some general tips:

- Sleep 7 hours per night, and eat breakfast; be energetic and enthusiastic, even if it requires espresso;
- Attend every class without exception, or let me know well in advance if you do need to miss a class;
- Read the material prior to each class, and make notes on the reading(s), including questions or points that intrigue, fascinate, confuse or repulse you (or any combination of the four);
- Try to relate the material to other topics discussed in the course;
- Bring your questions and comments to class and be prepared to speak;
- Be willing to engage with others, the instructor and guest lecturers, in a thoughtful and polite fashion;
- Talk about the class outside of class with others, whenever you have the chance;
- Write well; take into account my comments on your drafts; get help if you need it;
- Be nice to me (I like dark chocolate – anything 85% proof or higher).

When it comes down to it, there is absolutely no reason for anybody to get a grade lower than B– in this class. The only way you can get a C, D or F is if you fail to attend and/or do not do the work. Having said that, it is also very difficult to get an 'A' grade (95%+) in this course; to do so, you will need to: a) show consistent excellence in all of your work—both written and oral; and b) go above and beyond the expectations of the course, which may require taking creative risks.

GRADING RUBRIC:	95–100%	=	A	4.00	Near Perfect!
	89–94%	=	A-	3.67	Excellent
	83–88%	=	B+	3.33	Very Good
	77–82%	=	B	3.00	Good
	71–76%	=	B-	2.67	Average
	65–70%	=	C+	2.33	Below Average
	59–64%	=	C	2.00	Barely Acceptable
	53–58%	=	C-	1.50	Not Good
	47–52%	=	D	1.00	Poor
	0–46%	=	F	0.00	Not Acceptable

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ENGAGEMENT PIECE #3

Assigned: Thursday, March 31 @ 9:40 am
Draft Due: Thursday, April 7 @ 5:00 pm
Final Due: Thursday, April 14 @ 5:00 pm
Length: 1500 words, single-spaced, reasonable font-size (11-12)
Submission: As Word document, uploaded to Moodle
Worth: 10% of final grade

A large part of this course will be devoted to writing, understood as a *process* rather than simply a *means* of communication. In order to achieve this, we will be employing methods of *exploratory* writing, i.e., writing that is itself part of the process of developing one’s thoughts and arguments. Each student will be required to write a total of three 1500-word “engagement pieces,” in response to a major issue or question raised in the lectures or the readings. These pieces will take a variety of forms, and each will have its own specific requirements. Generally, the EPs will be graded in terms of the student’s ability to critically engage with a specific text, issue or question (note: critically does not mean “negatively”). Any opinion or idea is valid, providing you can back it up evidentially (or, failing that, rhetorically). You will have the opportunity to hand in drafts of your work, and will receive written and oral feedback. As the term progresses, evaluation of the EPs will become more demanding.

ASSIGNMENT

For this third and final engagement piece, we are going both 'native' and creative. I would like you to compose a dialogue (i.e., a fictional conversation between two or possibly three people), in which you are a scholar from Asia (choice of country and specific tradition is up to you; and you can be male or female) who has come to the West to learn about Western ways and report back to the leaders of your own country. In order to make things interesting, I would like you to be as 'alien' as possible. In other words, pretend that you have no prior knowledge of Western ideas, beliefs, customs, or practices (though you are a contemporary person - no time travel involved here). The setting or event can be literally anything (church, congress, basketball game, college frat party, classroom, boardroom, etc), but it needs to be realistic rather than fanciful. The trick here is to write a report that is reasonable - though not necessarily 'objective', because you will and should be biased by your own (i.e., Asian) background, to some degree. Stick to the dialogue; i.e., avoid descriptions, introductions, and stage directions. As always, the paper should be single-sided, 1500 words in length, and posted here as a Word document named in the following way: Smith-EP3d. First draft is due Thursday, April 7 (before 5:00 pm).

Student Name: _____

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Final Take-Home Exam

Bucknell University

HUMN 270

Examiner: Prof. James Mark Shields

ASSIGNED: Tuesday, May 3, 2011
9:00 a.m.

DUE: Tuesday, May 10, 2011
5:00 pm

Instructions: Answer THREE (3) of the following FIVE (5) questions as carefully and completely as you can, while keeping within the prescribed length restriction of AT LEAST 800 but NO MORE THAN 1000 words per question. You may utilize whatever sources you wish, though you MUST make use of any sources referred to in the questions. Please reference all sources used, with proper citations and a bibliography. Answers MUST be typed and single-spaced. You do not need to retype the questions, but make sure you note the NUMBER and TITLE of each question you have chosen to answer. Please submit the entire document via an email attachment on or before 5 pm on May 10th (unless otherwise arranged). Have fun!

ANSWER ANY THREE (3) OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. BEYOND ORIENTALISM?

We began this course by looking at Edward Said's argument in *Orientalism*, including critiques from diverse writers such as Clarke, Clifford, and Ibn Warraq. Now that we have spent 15 weeks covering a diverse array of topics related to East-West (more specifically Asia-West) relations in terms of history, economics, politics, religion, culture, literature, society and psychology, I hope you now have a fuller understanding and appreciation of Said's thesis—as well as the arguments of his critics. In 1994, Said wrote a "response" to some of his critics, which we discussed briefly in week 3. I would like you go back to that short piece (Week 3: Said2-Response) and reflect on AT LEAST TWO points that Said makes that you now have a different opinion about. In other words, an argument that you first accepted, and now do not, or vice versa—or one that you simply did not understand, but now do (or vice versa!). To add some depth, I would also like you to go back to the final reading of the course, by Clarke (Week 15: Clarke-Beyond Orientalism), and reflect on AT LEAST ONE POINT raised by Clarke that you feel is crucial to any discussion of orientalism today (this can be against Said, or simply emphasizing something in Said, or a point that you feel Said missed). As always, you may back up argument and reflections with material from other readings, class discussion, or outside knowledge.

2. INVENTING ASIA, INVENTING THE WEST

The big news today is, of course, the killing by US special forces of Osama bin Laden, mastermind of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center towers in New York City and figurehead for "global jihad." During the course, we reflected on the media coverage of events of the so-called Arab Spring. Already, some western outlets are hailing the death of bin Laden as part of the same positive trend in the Arab Islamic world. I would like to reflect upon the media coverage of this event, once again comparing and contrasting a variety of sources: at least ONE from the West (e.g., CNN, Fox, BBC), ONE from the Middle East (e.g., Al-Jazeera), and ONE from elsewhere (e.g., Chinese state-sponsored Xinhua). Although it is likely that most will be 'positive' about the death of bin Laden, look for subtle differences with respect to the way he or the event of his death is portrayed – or even with regard to what this might mean for the future of the "war on terror."

3. THE WEST FROM ASIAN EYES

Of all the Asian writers we looked at in the course, Mohandes (aka Mahatma) Gandhi is certainly the most historically significant. I would like you reflect on Gandhi's analysis in the following passage, from his essay "Hind Swaraj and Indian Home Rule" (1909):

Let us first consider what state of things is described by the word "civilization". Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life. We will take some examples. The people of Europe today live in better-build houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered an emblem of civilization, and this is also a matter to promote bodily happiness. Formerly, they wore skins, and used spears as their weapons. Now, they wear long trousers, and, for embellishing their bodies, they wear a variety of clothing, and, instead of spears, they carry with them revolvers containing five or more chambers. If people of a certain country, who have hitherto not been in the habit of wearing much clothing, boots, etc., adopt European clothing, they are supposed to have become civilized out of savagery. Formerly, in Europe, people ploughed their lands mainly by manual labor. Now, one man can plough a vast tract by means of steam engines and can thus amass great wealth. This is called a sign of civilization. Formerly, only a few men wrote valuable books. Now, anybody writes and prints anything he likes and poisons people's minds. Formerly, men

traveled in wagons. Now, they fly through the air in trains at the rate of four hundred and more miles per day. This is considered the height of civilization. It has been stated that, as men progress, they shall be able to travel in airship and reach any part, of the world in a few hours. Men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button, and they will have their clothing by their side. They will press another button, and they will have their newspaper. A third, and a motor-car will be in waiting for them. They will have a variety of delicately dished up food. Everything will be done by machinery. Formerly, when people wanted to fight with one another, they measured between them their bodily strength; now it is possible to take away thousands of lives by one man working behind a gun from a hill. This is civilization. Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories or mines. Their condition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work, at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires. Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. There are now diseases of which people never dreamt before, and an army of doctors is engaged in finding out their cures, and so hospitals have increased. This is a test of civilization. Formerly, special messengers were required and much expense was incurred in order to send letters; today, anyone can abuse his fellow by means of a letter for one penny. True, at the same cost, one can send one's thanks also. Formerly, people had two or three meals consisting of homemade bread and vegetables; now, they require something to eat every two hours so that they have hardly leisure for anything else. What more need I say? All this you can ascertain from several authoritative books. These are all true tests of civilization. And if anyone speaks to the contrary, know that he is ignorant. This civilization takes note neither of morality nor of religion. Its votaries calmly state that their business is not to teach religion. Some even consider it to be a superstitious growth. Others put on the cloak of religion, and prate about morality. But, after twenty years' experience, I have come to the conclusion that immorality is often taught in the name of morality. Even a child can understand that in all I have described above there can be no inducement to morality. Civilization seeks to increase bodily comforts, and it fails miserably even in doing so....

This civilization is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed. According to the teaching of Mohammed this would be considered a Satanic Civilization. Hinduism calls it a Black Age. I cannot give you an adequate conception of it. It is eating into the vitals of the English nation. It must be shunned. Parliaments are really emblems of slavery. If you will sufficiently think over this, you will entertain the same opinion and cease to blame the English. They rather deserve our sympathy. They are a shrewd nation and I therefore believe that they will cast off the evil. They are enterprising and industrious, and their mode of thought is not inherently immoral. Neither are they bad at heart. I therefore respect them. Civilization is not an incurable disease, but it should never be forgotten that the English are at present afflicted by it.

How might you interpret this passage in light of orientalism? Is Gandhi an “occidentalist”?

4. THE ASIAN MYSTIQUE

Find at least TWO examples of the “Asian mystique” in contemporary US popular culture. You can use television, movies, songs, advertisements, etc. Be sure to analyze each example in terms of something you’ve read (or we’ve discussed) in the course.

5. LOST IN TRANSLATION

Discuss the film *Lost in Translation* in terms of the depiction of Japanese people, culture, values, etc. On one level, the film is simply about cultural misunderstanding, but does misunderstanding go both ways? Do the two Western lead characters adapt to their sense of being outsiders? If so, in what ways? Why do think Japan was chosen as the setting for this film? What, if anything, is the “message” of the film?