

East:West
Subtitle: **Moving beyond our cultural differences**
MALS Course for Spring 2020
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The primary theme of this course is to use narratives that explore how cross-cultural study can help us move beyond binary distinctions to consider more nuanced scholarly analysis. So while we will begin with a comparison of Aristotle's excluded middle to a Confucian conception of both/and and the inseparability of opposites (ying/yang), an aspiration of the course is to develop respect for multiple perspectives and the power of evidence based reasoning in the presence of uncertain, ambiguous, incomplete, and conflicting information. We will compare and contrast basic paradigms of Eastern and Western culture through studying philosophy, poetry, food, art, architecture, sex/gender, ecology, flower arrangements, binary versus multimodal logic, plagiarism/forgery/facsimile, beauty, time, and literature.

Most of the readings are short articles, poems, essays, but three short books will be read over several weeks and we will discuss three films:

Obasan by Joy Kogawa (about Japanese Canadians removed from their homes and possessions during World War II) (1981). Of the three books, this is the text that will spend the most time on. We will also look at photography by Dorothea Lange, Ansel Adams, and Toyo Miyatake, the recent related decision by the Supreme Court, the current situation on the Mexican-American border separation of parents and children, Ai Weiwei's "Remembering" and the Politics of Dissent, and the "re-education" of Muslims in China. We will also discuss the film *Rhapsody in August* (1991, a Japanese film by Akira Kurosawa).

The Culture Map: Breaking through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business by Erin Meyer (2014). Primarily we will focus on her discussion of context richness of cultures, roles of logic and relationships in decision making, and different perspectives on time. Two films that on food East and West that we will discuss are *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*, a 1994 Taiwanese comedy-drama film directed by Ang Lee, and *Babette's Feast*, a 1987 film based upon a short story by Danish author Karen Blixen that was directed by Gabriel Axel. discuss the idea of the latitude of food: Darwinian gastronomy.

Fuzzy Logic: The Revolutionary Computer Technology that Is Changing Our World by Daniel McNeill and Paul Freiberger (they address the question: why was fuzzy logic more easily accepted in Asia than America; e.g., fuzzy rice cookers, bullet trains) (1994).

The first day of the course will begin with several verses from *Tao de jing* and Plato's parable of the cave. A few paragraphs from Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen's *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* will be used on Aristotle's excluded middle.

I have not yet decided on the day by day sequence of the probable following topics:

Flower arrangements: Ikebana/Bonsai versus Renaissance Fantasy Bouquets and Lineanaeus' floral clock → an exploration of space and time; Religious Gardens: Zen gardens versus European gardens planted as labyrinths.

Time: Cycles and circular time, rhythms, repetition versus linear time, progress versus Multi-Active Time.

Architecture: I. M. Pei's light-shadows/ Zaha Hadid's biomorphic forms/Frank Lloyd Wright's Japanese period.

Art: "Fractal Geometry of Chinese Landscape Paintings" versus German Gothic: "grotesque (or grottoesque) has come to be used as a general adjective for the strange, mysterious, magnificent, fantastic, hideous, ugly, incongruous, unpleasant, or disgusting"/one-, two-, and three-point vanishing perspective. Collaborative art: Poetry wall leading up to the 1989 Tennamin Square events and Wei Wei's children's backpacks post the earthquake destruction of elementary schools versus AIDS Quilt, Underground Railroad quilts ("Hidden in Plain View"), Judy Chicago's *Dinner Table*, the Wertheim sisters' collective *Hyperbolic Crocheted Coral Reef*, and Gee's Bend's quilt.

Ecology: Maya Linn's film: *A Strong Clear Vision* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JW0Cbrlyhcg>)/Lynn White Jr.'s essay: "The Historical Origins of Our Ecological Crisis." *Western Man and Environmental Ethics* (1973): 18-30. (Easier access: *Science* Vol. 155, Issue 3767, pp. 1203-1207 (10 Mar 1967))/ Possibly something from Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1995), pp. 132-59.

Sex/Gender: four essays: Anne Fasto Sterling's *Five Sexes* and *Five Sexes Revisted*; Emily Martin's *Egg and Sperm*; Stephen Jay Gould's *Of WASPS and Wasps*

Construction/Proof: Origami versus Ruler and Compass/Trisection of an angle and approximate value of Pi/Zeno's paradox

Controversy: Essay from *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* by Amartya Sen compared with a chapter in *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World* by Jack Weatherford on the Native American origin of our sense of caucuses.

We will also consider Michael Smithson's "A Taxonomy of Ignorance" from his book *Ignorance and Uncertainty*.