
General Examination Procedures

Asian Religions (AR)

The General Examination in Asian Religions consists of four parts:

1) a major field (e.g., religions of India, Tibet, China, or Japan)

The format of the major field examination is based on student needs as decided by the main advisor. It typically follows one of two formats:

- a) Students prepare six questions, each with its own reading list (roughly 15 to 20 titles per question) and respond to three questions selected by the instructor. Each response should be 8 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font) and is completed over a 72-hour period as a take-home exam. These questions are typically broad and ask for a general knowledge of the field. Past questions include topics such as definitions of emptiness in Mahāyāna Buddhism, problems with the category of popular religion in China, or the historiography of Kamakura Buddhism.
- b) Students write an essay on a more specialized topic using primary sources and, additionally, sit for a shorter exam testing general knowledge of the field. The specialized essay will be completed over the course of the semester, and general knowledge questions will be answered during the exam period, typically in a period of 24 hours. The precise scale and ratio of the specialized essay and general knowledge exam are determined by the instructor, but they should total roughly 25 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font). For instance, students might write eight pages on a general knowledge question (to be completed in 24 hours) and submit an essay of approximately twice that length.

2) a minor field covering religion in other cultural area(s) in Asia

Students may focus on one geographic region or tradition supervised by a single faculty member, or they may take an exam combining work on multiple areas with more than one supervisor. In other respects, the exam is identical to option “a” in the major field: a 72-hour take-home consisting of three 8-page essays (double-spaced, 12-point font) drawn from an approved reading list of six topics (roughly 15 to 20 titles per question).



GRADUATE PROGRAM

All students in the Asian Religions subfield are expected to work in some capacity (seminars, reading courses, etc.) with each faculty member in the subfield (Gold, Lowe, Teiser) prior to their exam, regardless of whether they complete an exam with that faculty member.

3) an outside field in another subfield within the department or in another department

For these exams, students follow the practices of the examining department or subfield. Students have traditionally taken exams in fields such as Chinese literature, Japanese history, or religion and philosophy; students should pursue a field that will best complement their planned dissertation research.

4) a more specialized essay laying the groundwork for a dissertation proposal

This essay generally takes the form of an initial draft of a dissertation prospectus. It should be about 25 pages long and include a tentative thesis, explanation of how it contributes to the field, literature review, planned schedule, and bibliography.

The General Examination must be completed by the end of the spring semester of the third year of study. Exams are typically taken in two contiguous exam periods in accord with the general examination dates set by the Graduate School. Students who complete a more in-depth research paper may petition to complete their exams over three periods, but they still must finish all components of their exam by the end of the spring semester of their third year.

Students arrive at a list of topics, specific readings, and set of questions in consultation with the instructor(s) administering the exam, who give final approval to the list. It is strongly encouraged for students to work together and share resources such as reading lists. The Graduate Administrator maintains a file of past exam questions that students may consult in designing their exams.

Students in other departments or subfields planning to take an exam in Asian Religions should follow the practices outlined above for the minor field. We do not follow the student's home department's exam practices.