

BC Islam in Asia  
ECTS 5

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### Module Overview

This module examines the development of Muslims' unique cultural, social, religious and political life in Asia. By incorporating a holistic approach that includes historical, cultural and political contexts, the module provides students with a deeper understanding of the multivariate processes that have shaped the existence of Islam throughout the region.

Central questions that this course addresses include:

- How has Islamic belief and practice been accommodated to the cultural traditions of Asian societies?
- How have Muslim minorities in Asia resisted the normative pressures of majority acculturation?
- How has the emergence of political Islam affected the relationship between religion and state in Asia?
- How has the discourse surrounding religious extremism affected Asian Muslims?

Ultimately, this module seeks to provide students with a better understanding of contemporary discourse concerning Islam in Asia by providing them with an ability to better contextualise how Islam has helped to shape Muslim societies, and how Islamic belief and practice has itself been syncretised to the unique social, cultural and political conditions of the region.

### Module topics

#### Week 1 – Introduction

Provides a broad overview of the module, including an outline of the thematic and geographic areas that will be discussed over the following weeks by giving an introductory lecture on Islam in Asia.

#### Week 2 – Pakistan (1/2)

In this session, I begin discussion on South Asia by providing an historical context, focusing on the period of time immediately preceding the establishment of independent India and Pakistan. I discuss the underlying social and political issues that led to the ideological split (two nation theory) within colonial India, which precipitated the rise of political Islam in the continent.

The class proceeds to cover the development of Pakistan as an independent state, including the Kashmir conflict with India and the splitting of East and West Pakistan, leading the formation of modern day Bangladesh.

### Week 3 – Pakistan (2/2)

I discuss the recent political history of Pakistan, and the changing role of Islam within the state structure. A number of key points in Pakistan's recent history are covered, including Pakistan's involvement in the Soviet-Afghan war and the conflict between Pakistan's military and political sphere. The ideological origins of Pakistan's Islamisation policies are discussed, along with the effects of those policies on Pakistani civil society.

### Week 4 – India

I begin this session by giving an overview of the arrival of Islam on the Indian continent, highlighting a number of key points including the Mughul dynastic empire and the arrival of the British Empire, discussing the differing realities for Indian Muslims throughout each period.

To conclude the module's coverage of India, I discuss the effects that the establishment of independent Pakistan had on India's remaining Muslim population. I also compare and contrast the structures of each state, demonstrating the dichotomy that exists with regards to independent India's relative secularism with the central role that Islam plays in Pakistan's national and political identity.

### Week 5 – Afghanistan

On discussing Afghanistan, I provide an overview of the levels of ethnic and linguistic diversity that exists in the region before examining the arrival and spread of Islam throughout the country. I particularly emphasise the importance of tribal culture in Afghanistan, and how tribal customs frequently overlap and shape the character of Islam in the country.

I examine a number of key points in Afghanistan's history, including the arrival of the British Empire and the Soviet Union, and how the circumstances of their arrival contributed to the popularisation of Islam as a form of opposition to foreign rule. I also discuss Afghanistan's struggle with modernisation and the emergence of the Taliban and the wider jihadi culture in the country.

### Week 6 – Central Asia

I provide an historical overview of three specific Muslim majority countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), discussing the arrival of Islam, and the impact of Tsarist Russia and the USSR on the Muslim populations in the region. To conclude, I also discuss the post-USSR period, examining the emergence of Independent Muslim majority states and the tensions that exist between Islamic and secular movements within each country.

### Week 7 – Reading Week

Mid-term interval. A customary break in teaching for one week

### Week 8 – China (1/3)

I introduce Islam in China by providing an historical context, discussing the arrival of Islam along the country's borders and how it continued to spread within Chinese society throughout key points in China's history.

I also provide an overview of China's two most populous Muslim minorities, the Hui and the Uyghur, highlighting their unique cultural and social traits and the many divergences that exist with respect to religiosity and their relationships with the state.

#### Week 9 – China (2/3)

I will also discuss the Chinese Communist Party's view on religion and Islam in particular, and how that view has manifested in law and policy. I then provide examples of the effects of religious policy on China's Muslim minorities within a number of social, cultural and economic contexts.

#### Week 10 – China (3/3)

To conclude coverage of China, I will provide an examination of how Asia's largest economy has used religion, specifically Islam, as a soft power resource in its public diplomacy with Muslim majority states.

#### Week 11 – Indonesia

Indonesia is examined within a historical context, emphasising how its position between India and China has shaped its cultural and economic development. The arrival and spread of Islam throughout Indonesia is also discussed along with the country's Dutch colonial heritage.

#### Week 12 – Conclusion

In this session, I provide a recap of the content covered in the module and reflect on the overlapping thematic issues that have been discussed in a number of national contexts.

### **Assessment**

BC students are assessed by two 1,500 word essays.

**Reading list:**

- Akhtar, N. (2009). Polarized Politics: the Challenge of Democracy in Pakistan. *International Journal on World Peace*, XXVI(2), 31–64.
- Dadabaev, T. (2014). Religiosity and Soviet “modernisation” in Central Asia: locating religious traditions and rituals in recollections of antireligious policies in Uzbekistan. *Religion, State and Society*, 7494(April), 1–26.
- Haghayeghi, M. (1994). Islam and Democratic Politics in Central Asia. *World Affairs*, 156(4).
- Harris, L. C. (1993). Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China’s Policy in the Islamic World. *The China Quarterly*, 133, 111 – 129.
- Gladney, D. C. (2003). Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism? *The China Quarterly*, 174, 451–467.
- Glatzer, B. (1998). Is Afghanistan on the brink of ethnic and tribal disintegration? In W. Maley (Ed.), *Fundamentalism Reborn: Afghanistan and the Taliban* (pp. 167–81). London: Hurst & Company.
- Grare, F. (2007). The Evolution of Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan and the Ever-Changing Face of Islamic Violence. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 30(1), 127–143.
- Mistry, M. B. (2005). Muslims in India: A demographic and socio-economic profile. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 25(September), 399–422.
- Omelicheva, M. (2011). Islam in Kazakhstan: A survey of Contemporary Trends and Sources of Securitization. *Central Asian Survey*, 30(2), 243–256.
- Spechler, M. C. (2007). Authoritarian politics and economic reform in Uzbekistan: past, present and prospects. *Central Asian Survey*, 26(2), 185–202.
- Thibault, H. (2016). Female Virtue, Religion and State Ideology in Tajikistan. *Central Asia Program - CERIA Brief*, (10).
- Thier, J. A. (2007). The Making of a Constitution in Afghanistan. *New York Law School Law Review*, 556, 558 – 579.
- Williams, B. G. (2011). On the Trail of the “Lions of Islam”: Foreign Fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 1980-2010. *Orbis*, 55(2), 216–239.