The Journal of Interreligious Studies
Issue 22, April 2018| http://www.irstudies.org

Preparing Students for Interreligious Dialogue: Experiential Learning as a Precursor for Pluralism

Beverley McGuire

This paper argues that experiential learning in introductory courses in the study of religion can prepare students for interreligious dialogue. In an introductory Asian religions course students intentionally engaged in social rituals, stillness, yoga or a social media fast, singing, nonviolence, and mindfulness meditation. Afterwards they reflected on their experience and brought it into dialogue with their understanding of Confucian, Daoist, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. This experiential and dialogical approach prepared them for engaging with pluralism at the end of the semester, when they not only discussed pluralism but also applied diverse religious perspectives to hypothetical scenarios of religious misunderstanding and existential crisis.

Keywords: experiential learning, Asian religions, stillness, social media, yoga, meditation, Interreligious dialogue, pluralism

Introduction

Interreligious learning equips students with knowledge, attitudes, and skills for understanding and engaging with people from diverse religious traditions in a pluralistic society. Scholars have argued that genuine interreligious dialogue occurs in groups and entails forming relationships across religious traditions.[1] Some define interreligious learning as "a form of interreligious dialogue emphasizing study in the presence of the religious other and encounter with the tradition the other embodies,"[2] which poses challenges for those who may not have religiously diverse classrooms.[3] Although most scholarship on interreligious learning focuses on religious or theological education, those who teach courses in the study of religion can also prepare students for pluralism. Diana Eck describes interreligious dialogue as "the expression of critique and counter-critique, the mutuality of voices that count and have something to say . . . as in any relationship, it is strongest in its mutuality, and it is weakest when one incorporates the other."[4] Pluralism involves actively engaging with others, attempting to understand them, and acknowledging real differences and particularities.[5] Scholars recommend various activities for enabling such engagement and understanding, including site visits that allow students to encounter

[1] Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, "The Meanings of Dialogue in Interreligious Teaching and Learning Today: A Response by Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook to Elena Dini," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 18 (2016), http://irstudies.org/journal/the-meanings-of-dialogue-in-interreligious-teaching-and-learning-today-a-response-by-sheryl-kujawa-holbrook-to-elena-dini/.

[2] *Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, Christians and Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other* (Woodstock, Ontario: Skylight Paths, 2006), 95.

[3] Peta Goldburg, "Developing Pedagogies for Inter-religious Teaching and Learning," in *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education*, ed. Kath Engebretson, Marian de Souza, Gloria Durka, and Liam Gearon (New York: Springer, 2010), 342.

[4] Diana L. Eck, "Pluralism: Problems and Promise," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 17 (2015), http://irstudies.org/journal/pluralism-problems-and-promise-by-diana-l-eck/.

[5] Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 70–71.

those with different religious commitments[6] and case studies that require students listen carefully to other perspectives as well as examine and refine their own.[7]

However, students must first understand religions on their own terms before engaging in interreligious dialogue, otherwise they tend to read their own presuppositions into other religious worldviews and subsume the voices of others within their own. When I initially taught the course, in an effort to ensure that they understood Asian religions on their own terms, I asked students to use Sanskrit or Chinese terminology instead of English translations, to bracket their own religious assumptions, and to avoid comparing religious traditions. Nevertheless, students persisted in translating terms such as *nirvana* as "heaven" and making simplistic comparisons between religious traditions. Considered in light of Chris Hermans' three types of religious education—mono-religious education that focuses on one religion in particular, multi-religious education that recognizes pluralism and presents religions in terms of their own self-understanding, and inter-religious education that not only recognizes pluralism but encourages dialogue between different religious practitioners[8]—they were not even engaging in multi-religious education, let alone inter-religious education, because they could not see religions on their own terms.

Experiential learning facilitates this understanding by offering an arena for students to interrogate their own assumptions and delineate other religious worldviews. Here I discuss an experiential curriculum that provides the scaffolding for such awareness and prepares students for site visits and engaging with diverse religious practitioners. It begins with a social location activity in which students articulate their diverse and intersecting social identities and reflect on how their social location impacts the way they experience the world.[9] I also incorporate Dena Samuel's activity "Standing Silently in the Face of Oppression," which helps students recognize that their experiences can be analyzed as systemic problems and inequalities.[10] This encourages students to identify their normative assumptions from the outset and engage in interreligious study only after they have delved into the complexity and diversity of each religion.

For each tradition students encounter a series of interpretive frameworks, beginning with a documentary conveying an insider's perspective, a discussion of a textbook chapter that gives a scholarly perspective, an experiential activity that allows them to reflect on their own perspective, and finally a textual analysis that incorporates multiple perspectives. Only after they have moved between these various perspectives for each religion do they discuss pluralism based on Diana Eck's

---

[6] Elena Dini, "Processing Experiences Within an Academic Framework: A Challenge for Interfaith Education," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 15 (2014): 38, http://irstudies.org/journal/processing-experiences-within-an-academic-framework-a-challenge-for-interfaith-education-by-elena-dini/; Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "When Practice Precedes Theory: A Study of Interfaith Ritual," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 20 (2017): 5, http://irstudies.org/journal/when-practice-precedes-theory-a-study-of-interfaith-ritual-by-jeannine-hill-fletcher/.

[7] Ellie Pierce, "'What is at Stake?' Exploring the Problems of Pluralism through the Case Method," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 17 (2015), http://irstudies.org/journal/what-is-at-stake-exploring-the-problems-of-pluralism-through-the-case-method-by-ellie-pierce/.

[8] *Chris A. M. Hermans, Participatory Learning: Religious Education in a Globalizing* Society (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 337–349.

[9] I adapt the social location activity developed by Mai-Anh Tran, discussed in Jack Hill, "Fighting the Elephant in the Room: Ethical Reflections on White Privilege and Other Systems of Advantage in the Teaching of Religion," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 12, no. 1 (2009): 3–23.

[10] Dena R. Samuels, "Connecting with Oppression and Privilege: A Pedagogy for Social Justice," accessed December 24, 2017, http://jfmueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/crow/connectingtooppressionandprivilege.doc.

"From Many, One" in *A New Religious America* at the end of the course.[11] Their final take-home test has them address possible misconceptions about religious practitioners (for example, that all Sikhs are militant or all Hindus polytheistic), and compare and contrast how Asian religious practitioners might interpret and respond to existential crises occasioned by the death of a loved one or natural disasters (such as Hurricane Matthew, which happened during one of the semesters).

Students engage in activities analogous but not identical to religious practices as they learn about each tradition: social rituals for Confucianism, stillness for Daoism, yoga or a social media fast for Hinduism, singing for Sikhism, nonviolence for Jainism, and mindfulness meditation for Buddhism. They do the activities and journal about them for several days, and they then submit a two-page reflection on how they might bring their experience into dialogue with the religious tradition under study, and how their experience might clarify similarities and differences between that tradition and others they are familiar with. As they progress they expand their comparative analysis to include not only their own religious traditions but those they have learned about in the course.

Because I teach at a public university in the southeastern United States, my approach differs from those who incorporate contemplative practices or inter-riting into their instruction.[12] The latter could criticize my activities for being decontextualized, reductive, or characteristic of a "buffet-style" or "wine-tasting" approach to practice.[13] Reflecting on her students' resistance to her invitation to experience what prostration feels like in their bodies by posturing their heads to the floor, Jeannine Fletcher writes, "this suggests that ritual cannot be accessed hypothetically and outside the sacred space, or that if ritual is so accessed, it certainly has a different quality to what is communicated."[14] I agree that the experiential activities in my class communicate different messages than religious practices themselves. These very differences allow my students to contrast their experience with religious practices as much as compare them. In fact, this very activity of critically examining their experience and simulating a dialogue that crosses religious traditions helps develop skills for interreligious dialogue.

To address a secondary concern that Fletcher raises—how decontextualized experience seems to offer no logic for participation or way "in" to the experience—I find my students all too eager to engage in these experimental activities. As Barbara Walvoord notes, students often hope to grow spiritually or religiously in their religion courses,[15] and my students enjoy using their lives as laboratories for such exploration. Because of their secular and seemingly superficial nature—I emphasize that they are *not* religious rituals—they do not pose issues for students with religious commitments. Instead my students approach them as an experiment in which they themselves are the subjects, and I encourage them to juxtapose their experience as much as compare it with the religious traditions under study.

---

[11] Eck, *A New Religious America*, 26–79.

[12] Louis Komjathy, *Introducing Contemplative Studies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017); Fletcher, "When Practice Precedes Theory."

[13] Louis Komjathy, "Approaching Contemplative Practice," in *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative Prayer,* ed. Louis Komjathy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 34.

[14] Fletcher, "When Practice Precedes Theory," 6.

[15] Barbara E. Walvoord, *Teaching and Learning in College Introductory Religion Courses* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 6–7.

Analogous Activities

Although they may seem superficial, analogous activities prepare students for interreligious dialogue by engendering respect for other religions and simulating interreligious dialogue internally through reflective writing. As one student remarked, "I go into these exercises skeptical and thinking it will be rather easy but in reality I end up learning a lot more than I thought I would and having more respect for the religion." Here I provide examples of how analogous activities impact students' understanding of and attitudes towards various Asian religions.

For the social ritual assignment, students are told to observe three rituals: (1) opening doors for others or letting them into traffic, (2) saying please and thank you or otherwise expressing gratitude, and (3) not ogling ("checking out") men or women with whom they were not involved.[16] They then have the option to choose two of their own, and students often elect to avoid gossip, look people in the eye (rather than looking at their phones), sit up straight, get up early, or clean their apartments. Of all the experiential activities, the social ritual hits closest to home for many of my students, who remark that it reminds them of how they were raised to have manners or be respectful. One student wrote:

> Many of these rituals were things I tried to do on a daily basis, but had never really made an effort to keep up constantly or paid much attention to as I did them. However, when I looked at these actions through the context of Confucianism, they made me feel a closer connection to the people around me. My "natural inclination to live harmoniously with others" and the spirit of *ren* or "co-humanity" could certainly be felt as I practiced these rituals.[17] As I sought to forge closer connections with others through maintaining eye contact and speaking politely, my natural inclination for compassion towards others was made apparent. This showed me that Confucianism is a relatable religion, despite its foreign roots and my previous unfamiliarity with the practice.

Many students referenced the notion of *ren* (benevolence, humaneness, or co-humanity) when they brought their experience into dialogue with the Confucian tradition, and some Catholic students identified similarities with their own religion's emphasis on performing actions that positively impact humankind. Others noted differences between the way they engaged in the practices and how a Confucian might practice them in the hopes of personal transformation or attaining perfection, and some Christian students wrote that Mencius's notion that humans are naturally inclined to be good conflicted with their own belief in original sin. Students also remarked that the activity clarified their understanding of Confucian rituals as everyday practices that refine and cultivate a person to create a harmonious society instead of worshipping God. In this way students used their experience as fodder for better understanding the Confucian tradition, but also for comparing and contrasting Christian and Confucian beliefs and practices.

---

[16] Dr. Justin Ritzinger originally designed the social ritual assignment, which inspired me to create the experiential learning curriculum for the course.
[17] Randall L. Nadeau, *Asian Religions: A Cultural Perspective* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2014), 32.

Whereas social rituals often resonate profoundly with their own upbringing, stillness proves challenging for the vast majority of my students. Instructed to engage in non-purposeful action for thirty minutes a day, students sit on their porch, sit at the beach watching the ocean, swing in their hammock, or drink tea. My students struggle with stillness, and in their reflection they often emphasize how it goes against American or Western emphasis on constant activity, time management, and goal orientation. As one remarked, "Compared to the Daoist ideal of the 'Uncarved Block,' it feels a bit like my upbringing has encouraged me to become sculpted, intricate, and defined. It is hard for me to stay away from normative judgment of these ideas because they are so opposite to those I have grown up with." In this way students are able to create a space for reflecting on profound differences between worldviews before judging one as superior to the other. Another student similarly noted, "My life has been constantly in pursuit of doing things. Not doing things seemed absolutely absurd to me. But I practiced this foreign concept and was astounded at the results . . . it never occurred to me that someone could be actively passive." What initially seemed absurd became not only intelligible but valued after the student engaged in the activity for several days.

When reflecting on their experience students can occupy a space between religious traditions, a fundamental skill for interreligious dialogue. As they proceed through the curriculum, they add to their comparative religious understanding, noticing differences and similarities between Confucian and Daoist traditions. On the one hand, they remark that the Confucian emphasis on perfecting oneself through ritual differs from the Daoist ideal of *wuwei* (non-action, non-purposeful action), but on the other hand as one student wrote, "I like Asian religions because they try to focus on self-awareness as well as living in peace among one another. Growing up in the Christian faith, they emphasized self-reflection a little bit, but they emphasized more letting God shape and change you. Daoists and Confucians emphasize doing things yourself, which is good to be aware of, but not exactly how I do things." They highlight how both Confucian and Daoist traditions emphasize the importance of harmony, and how humans could create such harmony (albeit through different processes), and they appreciate both traditions even though they differ from their own religious orientation.

Not only do students analyze Daoist concepts in light of their experience, but they also interpret their experience in Daoist terms. Students frequently allude to Daoist concepts of *yin* and *yang* when describing their experience with stillness. One wrote, "I feel that I have much more *yang* in my life and not enough *yin*. I am very active in my life and I do not ever feel like I get a chance to enjoy relaxing like I should. This assignment put into perspective just how out of balance my life really is." In this way students' lives become the texts that they interpret through Daoist and other religious lenses, which facilitates both their understanding and appreciation of the religious traditions under study. Students notice how their lives are in a state of imbalance; their constant busyness does not allow them the space for stillness. They also note how non-purposeful action allowed their minds to wander creatively. One student wrote, "This practice has made me realize that there are different ways of seeing and reacting to things. It really emphasized, to me, that there are different ways of thinking." By engaging in stillness for several days, students not only appreciate the Daoist tradition but also that there are alternative ways of perceiving the world.

Whereas stillness challenges my students' need to be busy and productive, social media fasts confront their desire to be constantly connected. When given the option to do yoga or engage in a

social media fast, most students opt for the latter and find it extremely difficult. Students often allude to Hindu ascetic ideals of "taming the ego" through discipline and self-control when describing their struggle to refrain from social media. One student remarked how the social media fast entailed "not feeding my ego such as not focusing on how many likes I get on my Instagram or Facebook posts or how many views I get on Snapchat." Several pointed out that it forced them to pay attention to other things in their life, especially people surrounding them. One student wrote, "I realized after the third day that I actually connect with more people and nature without having this social media. Many others and I are so caught up with the 'interaction' social media provides that we actually lose real connection with the world around us."

Figure 1: John Holcroft, "Digital Feed."[18]

Students admit that their social media fast is but a small taste of asceticism—what one student described as asceticism "on a minimal and superficial level." Nevertheless, it engenders respect and gives them a sense of why one might engage in an ascetic lifestyle. One student wrote, "Although I did experience an ego reduction in this activity, as I was able to gain control over my body and not let my thoughts and desires control my mind, I would not say that I had an experience of unity with the cosmic self." They acknowledge the difference between their experience and those of ascetics seeking to free themselves of attachment to the illusory world in order to achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

Many Christian students compare their experience with Lenten fasting practices, especially students who take my course in the spring, as it falls during the season of Lent. One student remarked, "They both require you to do something extreme, deprive yourself/push yourself farther than you normally would, and it gives you a chance to refocus on the spiritual truth and be more productive and motivated to do what it is that your faith requires you to do." While students who engage in the media fast draw similarities between their experience and ascetic practice, those who do yoga often point out the dissimilarities between Western approaches to yoga and its role in the Hindu tradition. They note how in the West yoga is primarily a means of physical exercise as opposed to a spiritual practice of self-discipline. One student remarked, "It felt just like an exercise

[18] John Holcroft, "Digital Feed," accessed January 4, 2018, http://www.johnholcroft.com/portfolio18.html. Used with permission.

class and I gained no insight. I think this is incredibly ironic considering that 'The great problem addressed by Hindu spiritual self-cultivation is our tendencies to identify ourselves purely with our bodies.'"[19] Although the student feels they gained "no insight," in fact their recognition of the disjunction between their experience and Hindu discussions of yoga facilitates an awareness of how religious practices can be appropriated and transformed.

For the singing assignment students select motivational songs to sing in the morning and evening, which they typically do in their room, shower, or car, but occasionally with other people. Although some choose religious songs or those they find spiritually significant—for example, one student chose Grateful Dead's "Ripple" (1970) and engaged in a thoughtful reflection on the "ripple with no pebble tossed"—most students choose secular songs that then become juxtaposed with Sikh songs sung in *kirtan* and morning devotionals. When they bring their experience into dialogue with the Sikh tradition, they focus on the important role singing plays within the tradition: how song was the primary medium for Guru Nanak's message, how it promotes harmony and balance for both listeners and performers, and how it serves as a means of communicating with God. Most students then remark how their own singing, outside of any religious context, was dissimilar from Sikh practice, or how their experience paled in comparison with Sikh practitioners who engage in their devotional singing between 3 and 6 a.m. in the morning. Many students write about the positive impact of singing on their mood and energy level, and they show appreciation for Sikh practice. One student wrote, "I may not believe in the same things the Sikhs do, but I can understand how they feel singing can help us connect with the world around us on a spiritual level."

Christian students often say it resonated with their own singing of hymns and devotionals, which they describe as "a form of worship to God, a way to show thanks and appreciation, and to bring the congregation together." A student remarked, "My grandma always tells me that singing is like a direct phone call to God." However, some Christian students contrasted their practice of singing hymns in a Sunday church service and daily devotional singing, such as one who wrote, "Their personal devotional singing, unlike my practice of it, is an extension of doctrine—it is a prescriptive aspect of their faith where it is not one of mine." Other Christian students started wondering why it wasn't a daily practice in their tradition: "While doing this I found myself thinking: if I really believe all the things I'm singing are true, then why do I only sing like this on Sundays? I think the simple answer (among other things) is that this sort of devotion was inconvenient." In this way the activity enabled students not only to appreciate Sikh devotional singing but also engage in internal interreligious dialogue about singing in Christian and Sikh traditions.

The nonviolence assignment entailed preventing harm of sentient beings (for example, by walking on grass) or engaging in "nonviolent communication."[20] Students remarked that it required tremendous discipline to not walk or bike on the grass, and how Jain ascetics would engage in even stricter practices to ensure they did not harm any form of life. As a result, students expressed great respect for their discipline, restraint, and perseverance. The nonviolence assignment also slowed their pace and heightened their awareness of themselves, nature, and how their actions affect the world around them. As one student wrote, "I felt more aware of myself and my

[19] Nadeau, *Asian Religions,* 110.

[20] Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 3rd ed. (Encinitas, CA: Puddledancer Press, 2015).

surroundings, as well as a level of appreciation for nature by simply avoiding harm." Those students who engaged in nonviolent communication said they initially had difficulty not evaluating or criticizing what other people said—especially family members—but that when they listened and responded free of judgment, their relationships improved. One wrote, "The most difficult thoughts to monitor were those of jealousy and desire, because it seems like we have grown up in a culture that every person wants what they do not have, even when what they have is completely sufficient." Several students discussed the differences between Jain emphasis on self-restraint and Western habits of consumption.

The final analogous activity, mindfulness meditation, allowed students to engage in breath awareness or body and sound meditation available through a mindfulness center website.[21] When they brought their experience into dialogue with Buddhism, they mostly referred to the importance of overcoming attachment to the self. As one student remarked, "While I might not have realized enlightenment over the span of several days, I have begun to grasp the concept of the self as a non-permanent entity." Some students said it was difficult to understand how one might not be attached to the self, writing, "When I wake up in the morning, all of the 'I' thoughts run through my head, meaning I am concerned all about myself, what I look like, what I have to do that day, etc." Many students felt frustrated by their constant mental chatter or continuous train of thoughts, and they speculated it would require years of practice to achieve any awakened state of mind. They also noted how Buddhist approaches to meditation differed from their previous exposure to meditation as solely used for relaxation or stress reduction. Several Catholic students compared their practice of meditation with their experience praying, though they also acknowledged theistic assumptions that differentiated the latter from the former.

Analogical activities can serve a variety of pedagogical functions. First and foremost, they impact students' attitudes and facilitate a greater appreciation and respect for different religious traditions. Secondly, they stimulate a greater understanding of those traditions by encouraging students to reflect on the ways in which experience is mediated by religion and culture—how their own social location impacts the way they interpret their experience, and how other religious perspectives might yield different explanations. Finally, they begin building skills for interreligious dialogue by having students reflect not only on similarities and differences between religious traditions, but begin to entertain the possibility of "similarities in differences and differences in similarities."[22] Instead of viewing religious traditions as wholly different, they can identify similarities within differences: for example, how Daoists and Confucians value harmony, even though they propose different ways of achieving such harmony. Similarly, they can avoid simplistic judgments by attending to the differences within similarities: for example, how a daily practice differentiates Sikh devotional singing from Christian hymns sung during worship.

However, the success of analogical activities stems from their significance for students, not solely from their pedagogical usefulness. Students often enroll in our courses to grow spiritually or better understand their religiosity. For those of us who teach at public colleges and universities — and perhaps for those reticent to incorporate contemplative practice into their courses—

[21] "Free Guided Meditations," UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, accessed January 3, 2018, http://marc .ucla.edu/mindful-meditations.
[22] Lee H. Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 1–6.

experiential learning can allow students to reflect on their own identity while simultaneously learning about other religions. Analogous activities can be incredibly motivating for students, as such activities use their lives as laboratories for their learning and allow them to reflect on themselves, while also enabling them to better understand other religious traditions.

Preparing for Pluralism

Having gained a foundational knowledge about these different traditions, an attitude of respect and appreciation, and basic skills in interreligious dialogue, my students better appreciate Diana Eck's emphasis on the difference between tolerance and pluralism. They understand the work that interreligious dialogue entails. When reflecting on Eck's writing, many quote the passage in which she states, "pluralism requires participation, and attunement to the life and the energies of one another."[23] Having spent the entire semester engaging with different religious perspectives and becoming better attuned to the life and energies of Asian religious practitioners, they consider it a skill to be developed. As one student writes, "Pluralism is not something that just exists, but rather it has to be created and it will always be an ongoing process that has to be worked on from generation to generation." They add their own examples of ways in which the normative status of Christianity in America continues to be assumed, and they emphasize how vital it is to understand and accept religious differences.

They disagree on the extent to which America has achieved a culture of pluralism. One of my students wrote that Eck's chapter reminded her of the bumper sticker "Coexist" that shows the crescent moon representing Islam for "C," a peace symbol for "o," a male/female symbol for "e," the Star of David representing Judaism for "x," a pagan symbol for the dot on the "i," a yin-yang symbol for "s," and a cross representing Christianity for "t" (Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: "Coexist" bumper sticker.[24]

This sparked a debate about whether the bumper sticker captures pluralism or instead "religious correctness." While some students maintained that it does illustrate acceptance and understanding of other religions, others disagreed. One student remarked, "I think most people

[23] Eck, *A New Religious America*, 70.
[24] Peacemonger, "Coexist in Interfaith Symbols Bumper Sticker," accessed January 7, 2018, https://www.peacemonger.org/S001--Coexist-in-Interfaith-Symbols-Bumper-Sticker_p_2658.html. Used with permission.

tend to believe that 'my freedom to my religion should be protected most, and I'll just put this bumper sticker on my car so people don't think I'm disrespecting their beliefs.'" She suggested that, at best, it represents a form of tolerance that is still insufficient.

Although they debate the degree to which Americans value pluralism, my students clearly do. They appreciate the orchestral image that Eck describes as "the symphony of society, each retaining its difference, all sounding together, with an ear to the music of the whole."[25] As one of my students wrote, "By comparing society to a symphony Eck is pointing out how different everyone and the groups within society are to each other but with collaboration amongst each other they are able to produce beautiful harmonies." Having paid close attention to the particularity of each Asian religion, my students appreciate the importance of not eliding such differences. They look forward to working together with different religious practitioners and creating harmonies through such interreligious encounters.

Beverley McGuire, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of East Asian Religions at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Her research interests include Buddhism and digital media, Chinese religious ethics, Chinese Buddhist religious practices, understandings of karma, board games, and divination rituals.

The views, opinions, and positions expressed in all articles published by the *Journal of Interreligious Studies (JIRS)* are the authors' own and do not reflect or represent those of the *JIRS* staff, the *JIRS* Board of Advisors, the *JIRS* Board of Reviewers, Boston University, or Hebrew College.

[25] Eck, *A New Religious America*, 58.