



Course Code: RELS5005
Title in English: Theories of Religious Studies
Title in Chinese: 宗教研究理論

Course description:

This course examines classical and contemporary religious studies theories. Students will develop an understanding of religion as both a subject and as a category of analysis. As a category of analysis, students will use religion to interrogate cultural production and social systems, paying close attention to how religion intersects with social institutions and categories of social difference, such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and (dis)ability. Students will connect the assigned academic readings to “real-life” examples in the news, media, and their own lives, thereby deepening and forming new theoretical understandings of religion.

Learning outcomes:

Upon completion of the subject, students will be able to:

1. Identify key scholars in the field and their theories, both classic and emerging
2. Develop critical reading skills of academic literature on religious studies, including reading, analysing, and summarising the argument of secondary literature; selecting and analysing primary materials including visual contents
3. Develop communication skills through class discussion and writing assignments
4. Develop research skills
5. Develop transferrable skills and apply theoretical knowledge to critical analyses of contemporary issues concerning religion and society

Course syllabus

Key point: Highlight the fundamental concepts involved in each topic in order to help students better understand what is and what is not covered in the course.

Topic	Contents/ fundamental concepts
Week 1 Introduction	
Week 2 Defining Religion Martin, Craig. 2017. “Religion and the Problem of Definition.” <i>A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion</i> , 1–18. Will be mentioned in class: Asad, Talal. 1993. “Introduction.” In <i>Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam</i> . Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University. Yang, C.K. 1961. “Introduction.” In <i>Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors</i> . Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.	The concept of religion is subject to debate and historically specific
Week 3 Functionalism Readings: Emile Durkheim: <i>Selected Writings</i> . 2012. Edited by Anthony Giddens. Cambridge: CUP. Introduction. Davie, Grace. 2004. “Chapter 5: The Evolution of the Sociology of Religion.” In <i>Handbook of the Sociology of Religion</i> , edited by Michelle Dillon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.	Emile Durkheim’s functional approach to religion



<p>Further reading: Chau, Adam Yuet. 2006. <i>Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China</i>. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Conclusion.</p>	
<p>Week 4 Rationalization Weber, Max. 2004. "Introduction" and "Puritanism and the Spirit of Capitalism." In <i>The Essential Weber A Reader</i>, edited by Sam Whimster. New York: Routledge. Further reading: Tran, Jonathan. <i>Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism</i>.</p>	Max Weber's rationalist approach to religion
<p>Week 5 Marxism MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1995 [1968]. <i>Marxism and Christianity</i>. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. Revised edition with new Introduction, London: Duckworth. Tremlett, Paul. 2023. <i>Religion and Marxism: An Introduction</i>. Equinox. Chpt 2: Marx: Religion, Ideology, Power, and Change. Further reading: Federici, Silvia. 2004. "Introduction." In <i>Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation</i>, 11–20. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia. 马克思的“欧洲中心主义”：后殖民研究与马克思学（下），<i>结绳志</i>，2021.</p>	The Marxist approach to religion
<p>Week 6 Ritual and Religious Actions Bell, Catherine. 2006. "Ritual." In <i>The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion</i>, Oxford: Blackwell. Watts, Shea. 2018. "Ritualizing Bodies: Exploring Religious and Political Affects." <i>Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology</i> 4, no. 2: 33–52. Further reading: Sun, Anna. 2016. "A Sociological Consideration of Prayer and Agency." <i>Tdr/The Drama Review</i> 60, no. 4: 118–29.</p>	The history of ritual theories and Catherine Bell's theory of ritualization
<p>Week 7 Religion and Modalities of Agency Mahmood, Saba. 2004. <i>Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject</i>. Princeton University Press. Introduction. Further reading: Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2013. "Do Muslim Women (Still) Need Saving?" In <i>Do Muslim Women Need Saving?</i>, 27–53. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Owen, Suzanne. 2011. "The World Religions paradigm: Time for a change." <i>Arts and Humanities in Higher Education</i> 10(3):253–268. Choi, Hyaewool. 2020. <i>Gender Politics at Home and Abroad: Protestant Modernity in Colonial-Era Korea</i>. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1, "Ideology: "Wise Mother, Good Wife"." Guo, Ting. 2023. "Eastern Religions are More Spiritual". In <i>Stereotyping Religion II: Critiquing Clichés</i>, edited by Brad Stoddard and Craig Martin. Bloomsbury.</p>	Saba Mahmood's theory of religious agency from within structures of subordination
<p>Week 8 Intersectional Feminist Study of Religion</p>	Intersectional feminist study of religion



<p>Valussi, Elena. "Men Built Religion, and Women Made It Superstitious: Gender and Superstition in Republican China." <i>Journal of Chinese religions</i> 48.1 (2020): 87–125.</p> <p>Singh, Jakeet. "Religious Agency and the Limits of Intersectionality." <i>Hypatia</i> 30.4 (2015): 657–674.</p> <p>Further reading: Lai, Francisca Yuenki. 2020. <i>Maid to Queer: Asian Labor Migration and Female Same-Sex Desires</i>. HKU. Chpt 2.</p> <p>Jia, Jinhua, Xiaofei Kang, and Ping Yao (eds.) 2015. <i>Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body</i>. SUNY.</p> <p>Yang, Mayfair. 2020. <i>Re-enchanting Modernity: Ritual Economy and Society in Wenzhou, China</i>. Duke.</p> <p>Kang, Xiaofei. 2023. <i>Enchanted Revolution: Ghosts, Shamans, and Gender Politics in Chinese Communist Propaganda, 1942-1953</i>. OUP. Introduction.</p>	
<p>Week 9 Affect Theory "Affect" in <i>Religion in 50 Words</i>.</p> <p>Hsu, Hua. 18 March 2019. "Affect Theory and the New Age of Anxiety," <i>The New Yorker</i>.</p> <p>Schaefer, Donovan O. 2015. <i>Religious Affect</i>. Duke. Introduction.</p> <p>Further reading: Ahmed, Sara. 2014. "The Affective Politics of Fear." In Ahmed, <i>The Cultural Politics of Emotion</i>, 62–81. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.</p> <p>Schaefer, Donovan O. 2019. <i>The Evolution of Affect Theory: The Humanities, the Sciences, and the Study of Power</i>. Cambridge.</p>	<p>Latest discussions in religious studies regarding Donovan Schaefer's concept of religious affects</p>
<p>Week 10 Religion and Science</p> <p>Schafer, Donovan O. 2022. <i>Wild Experiment: Feeling Science and Secularism after Darwin</i>. Duke. Conclusion.</p> <p>Further reading: Guo, Ting. "Spirituality' as Reconceptualisation of the Self: Alan Turing and His Pioneering Ideas on Artificial Intelligence." <i>Culture and religion</i> 16, no. 3 (2015): 269–290.</p> <p>Ni, Zhange. 2020. "Reimagining Daoist alchemy, decolonizing transhumanism: The fantasy of immortality cultivation in 21st c China." <i>Zygon</i> 55.3 (2020):748-71.</p>	<p>Most edge-cutting religious studies theory regarding reason as animated by feeling</p>



Teaching Modes and Learning Activities	
On-site face-to-face (please specify if it is hybrid, i.e. some students will attend the activities elsewhere)	Percentage of time
Lectures (hybrid no)	100%

Assessment type	Percentage
Attendance and Engagement	10%
Presentation	40%
Written Reflection	50%

Assessment rubrics
<p>A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows an exceptional degree of insight and critical and independent thought. • Demonstrates true flair in tackling issues. • Is of outstanding quality, in terms of scholarship and originality. • Often faultless. • The work is well beyond that expected at the appropriate level of study. <p>B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very good answer that shows qualities. • Addresses the question directly and fully, showing clear focus on the subject with only trivial deviation. • Exhibits a clear and coherent structure, showing logical, ordered thought and clear presentation. • Exhibits knowledge of a very good range of theories, perhaps with some gaps, but handled in a professional way. • Displays understanding and handling of key concepts: shows a firm grasp of the subject and current theory (but there may be gaps). • Shows initiative, the ability to think clearly, to critically evaluate ideas, to bring different ideas together, and to draw sound conclusions. • Displays evidence of further reading and appropriate use of examples and diagrams. • Contain no significant errors of fact or interpretation. • Develops a coherent analysis/argument proceeding to a convincing conclusion. • Without major blemish in the quality of the writing and presentation. <p>C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good answer with elements of the routine and predictable. • Sound knowledge, although limited.



- May contain occasional factual errors and misunderstandings of concepts but this should not be a dominant impression.
 - Generally accurate - inaccuracies, if any, should be moderate. Show understanding and handling of key concepts.
 - There may not be a firm grasp and depth of understanding of all the key concepts.
 - Focused on the subject, with relatively little irrelevant material. Exhibit a limited degree of critical analysis and evaluation.
 - Structured in a reasonably clear and coherent manner, generally presenting ideas and information in a logical way and often with some examples.
 - Generally well-presented but there may be minor flaws in information, figures and standard of English.
 - Generally shows a good quality of writing and presentation.
- D:
- Rarely prepared and attends some classes
 - Rarely participates constructively in class
 - Assignments are late, incomplete, or not turned in at all
 - Low level of content knowledge
 - Inactive participant; works reluctantly with others
 - Sometimes shows a close-minded disposition with regard to feedback and challenge
- F:
- Clearly unprepared and nearly always absent
 - No participation or harmful participation
 - No assignments turned in
 - No assignments available to assess content knowledge
 - Not present enough to judge participation and interaction, or undermining others
 - Close-minded disposition with regard to feedback, challenge, and course content

Class/ week	Date	Topic	Requirements
1	4 September	Introduction	
2	11 September	Defining Religion	
3	25 September	Functionalism	
4	9 October	Rationalism	
5	16 October	Marxism	
6	23 October	Ritual theory	
7	30 October	Modalities of agency	
8	6 November	Intersectional feminist study of religion	
9	13 November	Affect theory	
10	20	Religion and science (cogency theory)	
11~12	27 November & 4 December	Presentations	

Professor/Lecturer/Instructor:	
Name:	Ting GUO
Office Location:	KKB 213
Telephone:	3943-9872
Email:	tingguo@cuhk.edu.hk



Teaching Venue:	ELB_302
Website:	https://www2.crs.cuhk.edu.hk/faculty-staff/teaching-faculty/guo-ting
Other information:	

Teaching Assistant/Tutor:	
Name:	
Office Location:	
Telephone:	
Email:	
Teaching Venue:	
Other information:	

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed **declaration** that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

- In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.
- For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment.
- Students are fully aware that their work may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.
- Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgment and citations as suggested by the course teacher.

Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.

Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

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Use of generative AI tools

Approach 1 - All use of AI tools is prohibited in assignments and assessment tasks.