

**RELS 5323**  
**Life and Death in World Religions**

**1<sup>st</sup> Term 2024-25**

Instructor: Dr. Chow Wai Yin (周惠賢博士)

Dr. Tong Sau Lin (唐秀連博士)

Office Phone no.: 3943 1425

Email: wychow@cuhk.edu.hk

saulintong@cuhk.edu.hk

tongsaulin@hotmail.com

Lecture Time: Mon 7.00PM - 9:15PM

Classroom:

## **1. Course Description**

Life and death are the central concerns in most cultural and religious systems, which are usually transmitted through (oral) literature and rituals. Related themes include body and soul, good life and good death, and meaning of life, etc.

This course will take a thematic approach to examine the issues related to life and death in some major religions in the world, including the Chinese, Indian, and Abrahamic traditions. At the end of the course students should have gained a comprehensive understanding of the life-course models, the meaning of life, the symbolism of death, and the death rituals in these major religious traditions. Also, this course is intended to equip students with a broadened theoretical framework for taking other advanced courses in religious studies.

生與死是文化及宗教的重要關注，通常透過（口傳）文本和禮儀來傳達。與生死相關的主題包括身體與靈魂，善生與善死與生命意義等等。

本課程以主題研究為進路，通過對宗教教義、文獻、禮儀和象徵等方面的考察，了解世界三大宗教傳統(包括印度、中國與亞伯拉罕傳統)的生死觀，包括生命歷程，生命的意義，死亡象徵，死亡儀式。本課程也同時協助學生掌握宗教理論的基礎知識，為其修讀各宗教範疇的進階課程作好準備。

## **2. Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- ♦ Understand the issues of life and death in major religions of the world in their historical settings and contemporary contexts;
- ♦ Enhance their ability to have a critical and yet sympathetic understanding and appreciation of different religious traditions;
- ♦ Engage in a critical analysis of religions from doctrinal, textual and ritual perspectives.

### 3. Learning Activities

Lecture (hr) in /out class	Tutorial Presentation & Discussion (hr) in /out class	Tutorial presentation (hr) / course in /out class	Field-trip (hr) / course in /out class	Interview Journal (hr) in /out class	Course Reading (hr) in /out class	Written Assignment (hr) / course in /out class
2 per week	10 hours	1 in the seme ster			1 per week	10 hours
M NA	M NA	M NA	NA M	NA M	NA M	NA M

M: Mandatory activity in the course

O: Optional activity

NA: Not applicable

### 4. Course Structure

Class	Topic	Key Concepts
1  2/9	<p>Course Introduction</p> <p>* <u>Recommended Reading:</u> 鄭志明. "傳統社會生命教育的生死信仰." 第四屆台灣密宗國際學術研討會 (2008): 1-29.</p> <p>Death and Afterlife in Ancient Egypt, Near East and Ancient Greek Thought</p> <p>* <u>Recommended Reading:</u> Jerrold S. Cooper, "The Fate of Mankind: Death and Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamia." (Chapter 2) In <i>Death and After Life: Perspectives of World Religions</i>. Edited by Hiroshi Obayashi. Princeton, 1992.</p>	<p>Understanding of Life and Death from Religious Perspectives</p> <p>Death and Afterlife in the Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greek Thoughts</p>
2  9/9	<p>Death and Afterlife in Judaism</p> <p>* <u>Recommended Readings:</u> George E. Mendenhall, "From Witchcraft to Justice: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament," <i>Death and After Life: Perspectives of World Religions</i>.</p> <p>Bailey, L.R. "The Old Testament View of Life After Death." <i>Themelios</i>, vol. 11 (1986), no. 2, 41- 46.</p>	<p>Death and Afterlife in the Judaism</p>
3  16/9	<p>Death, Eternal Life and Hope in Early and Medieval Christianity</p> <p>* <u>Recommended Readings:</u> 林中澤, 陳賢哲. "早期拉丁教父的死亡觀評析." 暨南學報 (哲學社會科學版) 2 (2011).</p> <p>Hiroshi Obayashi, "Death and eternal life in Christianity," <i>Death and After Life: Perspectives of World Religions</i>.</p>	<p>Life and Eternal Life in Church Fathers and Christian Traditions</p>
4	<p>Death and Afterlife in Early Chinese Religions</p>	<p>Understanding of Death and Afterlife from</p>

23/9	<p>* <u>Recommended Reading:</u> Judith Berling, “Death and Afterlife in Chinese Religions.” (Chapter 13) In <i>Death and After Life: Perspectives of World Religions</i>.</p>	Chinese Religious Views
5 30/9	<p>Life, Death, and Afterlife in Taoism</p> <p>* <u>Recommended Readings:</u> 黎志添：〈從打齋儀式看道教對死亡的處理——一個死魂遠遊旅程的救濟：拔罪、救苦、度亡及成仙〉，收入梁美儀、張燦輝合編：《凝視死亡——死與人間的多元省思》。香港：中文大學出版社，2005，頁 55-78。</p> <p>Angelika Cedzich, “Ghost and Demons, Law and Order: Grave Quelling Tests and Early Taoist Liturgy,” <i>Taoist Resources</i> 4 (1993) no.2 , 23-35.</p>	Life, Death and Immortals in Taoist Traditions
6 7/10	<p>Concepts of Death in Confucianism</p> <p>* <u>Recommended Readings:</u> Keqian Xu, Guoming Wang, “Confucianism: The Question of Its Religiousness and Its Role in Constructing Chinese Secular Ideology,” <i>Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies</i>, vol. 17, issue 50 (Summer 2018): 79-95.</p> <p>余英時：〈孔子與巫傳統〉，《論天人之際：中國古代思想起源試探》，頁 149-169。台北市：聯經，2014 年。</p>	Confucian religiousness and its secular character in thanatology
7 14/10	<p>Concepts of Afterlife and Underworld in Hinduism</p> <p>* <u>Recommended Reading:</u> June McDaniel, “From the Underworld of Yama to the Island of Gems: Concepts of Afterlife in Hinduism,” in McDaniel, June, <i>The Routledge Handbook of Death and the Afterlife</i> (2018): 293-301.</p>	Karma and reincarnation, Hindu understandings of death and underworld, Hindu corpse rituals
8 21/10	<p>Life, Death and Afterlife in Shintoism</p> <p>* <u>Recommended Reading:</u> Shinjiro Kitasawa, “Shintoism and the Japanese Nation,” <i>Source: The Sewanee Review</i>, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 1915), pp. 479-483.</p>	Fundamental beliefs of Shintoism; principles of life and death in Shintoism
9 28/10	<p>Thanatology in Buddhism</p> <p>* <u>Recommended Reading:</u> Frank E. Reynolds, “Death as Threat, Death as Achievement: Buddhist Perspectives with Particular References to the Theravada.” In Hiroshi Obayahsi ed., <i>Death and After Life: Perspectives of World Religions</i>. (Princeton, 1992): Chapter 11.</p>	Understanding of Death and Afterlife in Buddhist Traditions
10 4/11	<p><i>Bardo</i> 中陰 in <i>The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying</i></p> <p>* <u>Recommended Reading:</u> 索甲仁波切著，鄭振煌譯：《西藏生死書：當代最偉大的生死學鉅著，最實用的臨終關懷手冊》，第七至八章。台北市：張老師，2022。(online access)</p>	The Manual for Dying in Tibetan Buddhism

11 11/11	Presentations: Group 1-3	
12 18/11	Presentations: Group 4-6	
13 25/11	Presentations: Group 7-8 and Paper Consultation	

**Textbook:**

Obayashi, H., ed. *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.

**5. Assessment**

Essay test or exam	Short answer test or exam	Term Paper	Presentation and Discussion	Class Participation
(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
		<u>50</u>	<u>50</u> (20 group + 20 individual) + presentation ppt (10)	

- ♦ Presentation and Presentation PPT (40% + 10%)
  - You will work in **a group of 4 to 5 students** for a group presentation. From week 11 onward (starting 11/11), several groups will give a presentation on any one of the topics related to “Life and Death in World Religions”.
  - Each group is required to study **a religious text** or **ritual** related to the theme of Life **or** Death. Your study contains your discoveries, comments, reflections, responses, comparisons, and questions to the religious believers’ understanding of life and death. **Your study questions can be centered around one (1) of the following two areas:**
    - Does life have a meaning that survives death? What are the contents of “meaning” here? Would it help if there were a religious god? Or would a religious god make no difference?
    - Is death a destroyer (or an enhancer) of life meaning? Would it be good (or bad?) for an individual to live forever? Why is the thought of death so closely linked to the meaning of life? Or other topics related to the course.
  - Presentation Requirements:
    - Each group will be expected to give **a 25-minute in-class presentation**.
    - You are required to provide **a Group PowerPoint presentation** to show your findings, reflections, and suggestions.
    - The PowerPoint presentation must be **uploaded to Blackboard** after the in-class presentation (10% of the overall assessment).

➤ Assessment Criteria

The assessment of this group assignment will be based on the following:

- Group performance: 20%
- Individual performance: 20%
- Group PowerPoint presentation: 10%

◆ Term Paper (50%)

- Students are required to submit a final paper, which analyzes and evaluates critically in the topic of life and death in world religions. **Essay Length: 3500-4000 words.**
- Students can **study a religious text or ritual** related to the theme of Life or Death. Your study contains your discoveries, comments, reflections, responses, comparisons, and questions to **the religious believers' understanding of life and death.** Your study questions can be centered around **one** of the following two areas:
  - *Does life have a meaning that survives death? What are the contents of "meaning" here? Would it help if there were a religious god? Or would a religious god make no difference?*
  - *Is death a destroyer (or an enhancer) of life meaning? Would it be good (or bad?) for an individual to live forever? Why is the thought of death so closely linked to the meaning of life?*
  - *Or other related topics discussed in the course.*
- Papers will be graded according to its content, focus of argument, discussion, and academic referencing style. The main objective of this reflection paper is to have students familiarize themselves with the original source materials and the extensive literature available on this topic.
- Papers should be submitted in **both hard and soft copy**. **Soft copy and VeriGuide submission** onto Blackboard is due by **11:59 pm on 2 Dec 2024 (Friday)**. 10 marks will be deducted for each day of late submission of soft copy. Submissions after 10 days will receive a zero mark.
- Hard copy submission: **Due by 4.30pm on 5 Dec 2024 (Thurs)**, details on the submission arrangement to be announced later.

## 6. Grade Descriptors

- A Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.
- A- Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.
- B Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.
- C Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weakness
- D Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes.

F Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specific requirements.

## 7. Feedback for evaluation

- ◆ End-of-term university course evaluation will be conducted in class.
- ◆ Students' comments and feedback on the course through e-mails or personal meeting with the instructor are always welcomed.

## 8. Facility for Posting Course Announcements

- ◆ Related course materials are delivered via the platform "Blackboard" (<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/eLearning/>)

## 9. Academic honesty and plagiarism

- ◆ Students must submit their papers **in soft copy via VeriGuide**. Relevant information on academic honesty and plagiarism can be allocated at: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty>.
- ◆ When you use other writer's ideas or findings, **you are advised to represent them in your own words**. Simply copying of full sentences or parts of sentences from the source article is not allowed.

## 10. Use of AI tools: allowed with explicit acknowledgement and proper citation

- ◆ Students may use some AI tools in some class activities and assignments on the condition that they **make explicit acknowledgement** and **proper citations** of the input from AI tools.
- ◆ Acknowledging support from AI tools: Students are required to acknowledge all functional uses of a generative AI tool and **cite it when they paraphrase, quote, or incorporate into their own work any content** (whether it is text, image, data, or other format) that was created by it.

- ◆ **An example of acknowledgement**

*I acknowledge the use of (name of AI tool – e.g. ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com/>)) to (specify the support, e.g. plan my essay, generate some ideas for the content, ask for examples of data collection instruments, get the dates of historical events, etc.).*

- ◆ **An example of citation**

OpenAI. (2023). *ChatGPT* (Mar 20 version). <https://chat.openai.com/chat>

- ◆ **An example of including texts generated by an AI tool in work**

"The following text was generated by an AI tool / language model (ChatGPT):"

[Insert the text generated by ChatGPT here.]

- ◆ **An example of including texts generated by an AI tool and the prompts that were used to elicit the text from the AI tool**

"[The prompt], as generated by an AI language model (ChatGPT):"

[Insert the text generated by ChatGPT in response to the prompt.]

- ◆ Students are reminded to learn and use the AI tools responsibly and ethically and be aware of the limitations
- ◆ Students are reminded to clarify with the course teacher and obtain permission if necessary when

in doubt.

## 11. Default Teaching mode: On-site face-to-face

## 12. References

### ♦ General references on world religions

Juergensmeyer, Mark. ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Nielsen, N. C. Jr. et al. ed. *Religions of the World*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

Sharma, Arvind, ed. *Our Religions*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

Smart, Ninian. *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Smith, Huston. *The World's Religions*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

### ♦ References related to Religion, Life and Death

余英時著；侯旭東等譯：《東漢生死觀》。上海：上海古籍出版社，2005。

李豐楙、朱榮貴編：《儀式、廟會與社區——道教、民間信仰與民間文化》。台北：中央研究院中國文哲研究所，1996。

肯內斯·克拉瑪著；方蕙玲譯：《宗教的死亡藝術——世界各宗教如何理解死亡》。臺北：東大圖書公司，1997。

馬昌儀：《中國靈魂信仰》。台北：漢忠文化事業，1996。

張燦輝、梁美儀合編：《凝視死亡——死與人間的多元省思》。香港：中文大學出版社，2005。

傅偉勳：《死亡的尊嚴與生命的尊嚴》。台北：正中書局，2004。

蒲慕州：《墓葬與生死：中國古代宗教之省思》。北京：中華書局，2008。

鄭志明：《道教生死學》 第二卷。文津出版社有限公司，2012。

黎志添：《香港道堂科儀歷史與傳承》。香港：中華書局，2007。

黎志添：《廣東地方道教研究：道觀，道士及科儀》。香港：中文大學出版社，2007。

釋慧開：《儒佛生死學與哲學論文集》。台北：洪葉文化事業有限公司，2004。

Adair, James R. *Introducing Christianity*. New York; London: Routledge, 2008.

Aiken, Lisa. *Why me, God?: a Jewish Guide for Coping with Suffering*. Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, 1996.

Anderson, Carol. *Pain and Its Ending: The Four Noble Truths in the Theravada Buddhist Canon*. Richmond: Curzon, 1999.

Buckley, James J. et al. ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007.

Chalmers, R. C. and Irving, John A., ed. *The Meaning of Life in the Five Great Religions*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965.

- Coward, Harold, ed. *Life after Death in World Religions*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Flood, G.. *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: CUP, 1996.
- Halevi, Leor. *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Hamilton, S. *Indian Philosophy – A Very Short Introduction*. New York: OUP, 2001.
- Kinsley, David R. *Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1993.
- Lai, Chi-tim. “The Ideas of Illness, Healing and Morality in Early Heavenly Master Daoism.” in *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China*, edited by Alan K.L. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- Lipner, J.J. *Hindus – Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Neusner, Jacob and Avery-Peck, Alan J., ed. *The Blackwell Reader in Judaism*. Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 2001.
- Nickelsburg, Jr., George W.E. *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.
- Obayashi, Hiroshi, ed. *Death And Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*. New York: Praeger, 1992.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath. *Imagining Karma: Ethical Transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek Rebirth*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, Press, 2002.
- Olivelle, Patrick. *The Early Upanisads: Annotated Text and Translation*. NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Onians, Richard Broxton. *The Origins of European Thought: About the Body, the Mind, Soul, the World, Time, and Fate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.
- Rustomji, Nerina. *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Schönborn, Christoph. *From Death to Life: the Christian Journey*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.
- Segal, Eliezer. *Introducing Judaism*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Smith, Jane Idleman. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Spiro, Howard M., et al. ed. *Facing Death: Where Culture, Religion, and Medicine Meet*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Sullivan, Lawrence E., ed. *Death, Afterlife, and the Soul*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987.
- Theodor, I. *Exploring the Bhagavad gita: Philosophy, Structure and Meaning*. Surry: Ashgate, 2010.
- Walls, Jerry L., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Watson, James L. and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds. *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1988.
- Wolf, Arthur P., ed. *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974.

♦ **Films/DVD**



Luchino Visconti. *Death in Venice*, 1971

Monty Python. *The Meaning of Life*. 1983.

Terrence Malick. *The Tree of Life*. 2011.

*Tuesday with Morries*. 1999.

櫻桃的滋味. 1997.