

CURE1111 THE STUDY OF RELIGION

2024-25 Second Term

Class Time	Mo 14:30 - 16:15 (Lecture Class) Mo 16:30 - 17:15 (Tutorial Class)
Classroom	Lee Shau Kee 306 (Lecture Class)
Teacher:	Dr. CHOW Wai Yin (Dept of CRS) Email: wychow@cuhk.edu.hk

1. Course Description

This course introduces students to the different aspects of religion and the key theories and concepts in the study of religion. It is an introductory course and expects no prerequisite knowledge from students. It will explore a variety of major aspects of religion such as religious experience, myth, ritual, sacred space and time, sacred text, ethics, and social and institution. This course aims to help students equip themselves with some of the basic analytical tools and embark on their studies of different forms of religious phenomenon in history and in contemporary society.

2. Learning Outcomes

Knowledge outcomes

- a. To become familiar with the basic vocabulary of the field of religious studies
- b. To develop an understanding of the key theories, concepts, and issues in the study of religion
- c. To be able to reflect on the relationship between religion and the human condition
- d. To be able to engage in a critical analysis of religious phenomena in the perspectives of the key theories and concepts, taking into account of the key issues involved

Attitude outcomes

- a. To develop a critical yet sympathetic attitude in understanding religious phenomena
- b. To develop a sensitivity to religious dimension of human life

3. Course Content and Schedule

1 **Class 1 (6 Jan): Course Introduction**

- Course Overview, Assessments and Learning Activities
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2 **Class 2 (13 Jan): Dive into the Study of Religion**

- What is Religion?: Discover the definition and explore its significance in everyday life.
- Nine Aspects of Religion: Unpack the diverse elements that shape religious traditions.
- Lenses of Analysis:
 - Functionalist Approach: What roles does religion play in society?
 - Hermeneutical Approach: How do we interpret religious texts and meanings?

Reading: Kessler, "Thinking About Being A Student of Religion," *Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases*, Chapter 1.

3 **Class 3 (20 Jan): The Psychology of Religion**

- Pioneers of Thought: Delve into the works of William James (1842–1910) and Carl Jung (1875–1961).
- Key Approaches:
 - Behaviorism: What do observable behaviors tell us about faith?
 - Psychoanalytic Approach: How do our psychological processes influence religion?
- Understanding Faith: Examine how psychological factors shape our beliefs.

Reading: "Psychological Approaches," *Theory and Method in Religious Studies*, p.253-320.

4 **Class 4 (27 Jan): Sociological Approaches to Religion**

- Key Figures: Learn from Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Peter Berger (1929–2021).
- Key Approaches:
 - Structural-Functionalism: How does religion maintain social stability?
 - Conflict Theory: Can religion be a source of social conflict?
- Social Dynamics: Explore how religion acts as a powerful social institution.

Reading: "Sociological Approaches," *Theory and Method in Religious Studies*, p.321-350.

✧ **Tutorial Class: Presentation Groupings**

5 **Class 5 (3 Feb): New Year Vacation – No Class**

6 ***Class 6 (10 Feb): Comparative Studies of Religion**

- Key Figures: Insights from Ninian Smart (1927–2001) and Mircea Eliade (1907–1986).
- Key Approaches:
 - Comparative Methodology: What can we learn by comparing different religions?
 - Cross-Cultural Analysis: How do various cultures interpret and practice religion?
- Diversity in Faith: Discover the richness of religious expressions around the globe.

Reading: Paden, William E. "Comparison in the Study of Religion." *New Approaches to the Study of Religion 2* (2004): 77-92.

7 **Class 7 (17 Feb): Phenomenological Approach to Religion**

- Key Figures: Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) lead the way.
- Key Approaches:
 - Lived Experience: What does religion mean to individuals?
 - Descriptive Analysis: How can we capture the essence of religious experiences?
- Personal Insights: Gain a deeper understanding of believers' perspectives.

Reading: *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, chapter 2.13

✧ **Tutorial Class: Book Sharing by RS Alumni**

8 **Class 8 (24 Feb): Field Trip Study**

- Date: 22 Feb (Sat)
- Time: 10:00 – 14:00 (with lunch provided)
- Place: ISKON at Tsim Sha Tsui

*Note: No class on 24 Feb (Mon); **Take Home Quiz**

9 **Class 9 (3 Mar): Reading Week - No Class**

10 **Class 10 (10 Mar): Anthropological Approaches to Religion**

- Key Figures: Engage with Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) and Mary Douglas (1921–2007).
- Key Approaches:
 - Ethnography: What can we learn from immersive studies of religious cultures?

- Cultural Relativism: Why is it important to understand beliefs within their cultural contexts?
- Culture and Faith: Examine how religion is intertwined with cultural practices.

Reading: "Cultural Anthropological Approaches," *Theory and Method in Religious Studies*, p.351-380.

✧ **Tutorial Class: Presentation 1**

11 Class 11 (17 Mar): Rituals and Religious Practices

- Key Figures: Discover insights from Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957) and Victor Turner (1920–1983)
- Key Approaches:
 - Symbolic Interactionism: What meanings do rituals hold for communities?
 - Comparative Ritual Studies: How do rituals vary across cultures?
- Community Bonds: Understand the vital role rituals play in religious life.

Reading: Grimes, Ronald L. "Performance theory and the study of ritual." *New Approaches to the Study of Religion 2* (2004): 109-138.

✧ **Tutorial Class: Presentation 2**

12 Class 12 (24 Mar): Field Study of Religion

- Key Figures: Learn from Mary Douglas (1921–2007): and Alfred Gell (1945–2015):.
- Key Approaches:
 - Participant Observation: How can immersive research provide insights into faith communities?
 - Qualitative Interviews: What personal narratives reveal about beliefs and practices?
- Direct Insights: Engage with real-world religious practices and community dynamics.

Reading: *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, chapter 2.13

✧ **Tutorial Class: Presentation 3**

13 Class 13 (31 Mar): Contemporary Approaches to Religion

- Key Figures: Explore ideas from Judith Butler (b. 1956) and Talal Asad (b. 1925).

- Key Approaches:
 - Feminist Approaches: How does gender shape religious traditions?
 - Postmodern Critiques: Challenge traditional narratives and explore new interpretations of religion.
 - Evolving Perspectives: Analyzes the evolving nature of religion in the context of modernity, globalization, and social change.

Reading: *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, chapter 2

✧ Tutorial Class: Presentation 4

14 Class 14 (7 April): Future Directions in the Study of Religion

- Key Figures: Insights from Karen Armstrong (b. 1944) and David Chidester (b. 1947):.
- Key Approaches:
 - Interdisciplinary Methods: How can combining fields enrich our understanding of religion?
 - Digital Humanities: What role do digital tools play in contemporary religious studies?
- Relevance Today: Emphasize the adaptability and importance of religious studies in a diverse world.

Reading: Dawson, Lorne L. "Religion and the Internet." *New Approaches to Study Relig. Reg. Crit. Hist. approaches* 1 (2004): 385.

✧ Tutorial Class: Presentation 5

15 Class 15 (14 April): Final - Take Home Quiz and Paper Consultation

4. Course Reading

Engler, Steven, and Michael Stausberg, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. Second edition. Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2022.

Whaling, Frank, ed. *Theory and method in religious studies: contemporary approaches to the study of religion*. Vol. 27. Walter de Gruyter, 2012.

5. Assessment Scheme

Tasks	Weight
Active Participation	10%

2 Take Home Quizzes	10 +10%
Field Trip Participation	10%
Presentation & Term Paper	25% + 35%

5.1 Participation & Tutorial Class Discussion (10%)

The success of this course depends on the participation of all of us. You will be permitted 2 unexcused absences during the course. You are also encouraged to actively participate in the discussion both in the class and in tutorials.

5.2 Field Trip Participation (10%)

A field trip is a course-related activity that serves the educational purposes of the course. Students are encouraged to participate in a field trip to receive practical information that is difficult to be conveyed in the classroom. During the field trip, students are suggested to interact with people in the visiting community and expose yourselves to local religious culture.

5.3 Group Presentation (25%)

You will work in groups of three, applying course theories and concepts to study 1-2 dimensions of a religious phenomenon, **starting from March 10**. Each group will give a 25-minute presentation on the findings of their study project. The topic of study project can be either one of the followings:

- A.** Case Study: Choose any religious phenomenon in history or in the contemporary world (a religious group, a religious site, religious practice, etc.) as the object of study. Focus on one or two religious dimensions of it. You may start from a brief survey on its history, founders, beliefs and practices, ethnicities of members, etc. Then using the theories and concepts learned in the course to interpret and analyze how these religious dimensions give influence to the lives of their followers and others, individually and collectively, within and across different society and cultures.
- B.** Research Literature Review: Select 10 journal articles or book chapter on one of religious dimensions (e.g. the research on “sacred”, religious myths, religious rituals and etc), summarizing previously published research articles and presenting, organizing or explaining the results from your perspectives in new ways.

5.4 Term Paper (35%)

- You will write a term paper based on the constructive feedback from the peers and the teacher on your class presentations. The essay should be 2,500-3,000 words in length. If writing in Chinese, it is typically 80% of the word limit.
- 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 handed in both soft copy via VeriGuide and Blackboard on at **11.55 pm, 26/4/2024 (Saturday)**. Late submission will be penalized: 10 marks will be deducted for one day of late submission. Submission after 10 days will be given a zero mark.

6. Learning Activities

Lecture (hrs) in /out class	Tutorial (hrs) in /out class	Field Trip Study (hrs) in /out class	Group Projects (hrs) in /out class	Final Paper (hrs) in /out class
2	1	4	5	10
M	M M	M	M	M

M: Mandatory activity

O: Optional activity

NA: Not applicable

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. Feedback for Evaluation

Students are welcome to give comments and feedback on the course through emails in CU e-Learning System, or personal exchanges with the teacher. An end-of-term university wide course evaluation will be conducted in class.

10. A facility for posting course announcements

Course announcements, assignment, and feedback will be given through CU e-Learning System. All questions with regard to the course could be posted on the discussion forum or via e-mails within the CU e-Learning System.

11. Academic honesty and plagiarism

Each student must upload a soft copy of the completed papers to the plagiarism detection engine VeriGuide. The system will issue a receipt which also contains a declaration of honesty, which should be signed and handed in to the teacher.

12. Reading List

Chitakure, John. *The Pursuit of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religious Studies*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016.

Engler, Steven, and Michael Stausberg, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. Second edition. Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2022.

Kessler, Gary E. *Studying Religion: An Introduction through Cases*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2008.

Livingston, James C. *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2009.

Pals, Daniel. *Nine Theories of Religion*. Third edition. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Sindima, Harvey J. *Introduction to Religious Studies*. Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 2009.

Whaling, Frank, ed. *Theory and method in religious studies: contemporary approaches to the study of religion*. Vol. 27. Walter de Gruyter, 2012.

A Note:

Please check the Course Blackboard Page regularly for course updates, announcements, weekly lecture notes, readings materials, class activities, submission of assignments, grading criteria of assignments, and etc.