

Department of Cultural and Religious Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

CURE1110 Religion and Contemporary Life 宗教與當代生活
1st Term 2023-2024

Time: Wed 11:30 - 13:15 (LECT) Venue: YIA503

Time: Wed 13:30 - 14:15 (TUT) Venues: YIA503, 506, 510, 511

Teachers: Prof. YEUNG Kwok Keung (kkyeunghk@gmail.com)
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TAs:

1. Course Description

Despite their long histories, the dominant world religions continue to exert their influence on our contemporary world. This course introduces students to this religious presence in some prominent aspects of our contemporary life. After introducing some basic definitions and understandings of religion, it will explore topics that cover issues of postmodernity, New Age and New Religious Movements, social discrimination, gender and sexuality, religious practices, and transhumanism and posthumanism. The exploration of such issues will help students to see how religions transform and are transformed by our present world. This course is an introductory course and expects no prerequisite knowledge from students.

2. Content

Week	Lecture Date	Lecture Topic	Key Concepts
1	6/9	Course Introduction	
2	13/9	What is Religion? <i>Reading:</i> Mary Pat Fisher, "The Religious Response," <i>Living Religions</i> (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1997), 12-37 <Tutorial grouping>	Definitions of religion, reasons for joining religion, insider-outsider challenge; sympathetic and critical attitudes
3	20/9	Religion in the (Post-)modern World <i>Reading:</i> Stephen Hunt, "Postmodernist perspectives: the yet but not yet," in <i>Religion and Everyday Life</i> . London: Routledge 2005, pp.28-43. <Meeting with tutors>	(De-)secularization, the collapse of meta-narratives, spiritual marketplace, fundamentalism

4	27/9	<p>Caste System and Hinduism</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Harold Coward, “Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Untouchability”. Harold Coward ed., Indian Critiques of Gandhi. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, pp. 41-66.</p> <p><Meeting with tutors></p>	Caste system, hierarchy of sacredness in Hinduism
5	4/10	<p>Women in Buddhism and Religious Taoism</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Claudia Romberg, “Women in engaged Buddhism,” <i>Contemporary Buddhism</i>, 3:2, pp. 61-170, 2002.</p> <p><Meeting with tutors></p>	Position and image of women in Buddhism and Religious Taoism
6	11/10	<p>Christian Framing of Homosexuality</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>Dawne Moon (2014) Beyond the Dichotomy: Six Religious Views of Homosexuality, <i>Journal of Homosexuality</i>, 61:9, 1215-1241.</p> <p><Meeting with tutors></p>	Christian views of homosexuality, procreative sex, sodomy, natural law theory
7	18/10	<p>Shintoism and Religious Consciousness in Japan; Contemporary Japanese Religions</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Daniel A. Metraux, “The Soka Gakkai: Buddhism and the Creation of a Harmonious and Peaceful Society,” in Christopher S. Queen and Saille B. King ed. <i>Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia</i>. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 365-400.</p> <p><Tutorial #1></p>	Shintoism, Characteristics of Japanese religion, Contemporary Japanese religions
8	25/10	<p>Islamic Veiling of Women</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>Paul Eid (2015), “Balancing agency, gender and race: how do Muslim female teenagers in Quebec negotiate the social meanings embedded in the hijab?” <i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>, 38: 11, 1902-1917.</p> <p><Tutorial #2></p>	Banning hijab in Europe, women’s agency in veil-wearing, changing meanings of women’s veil-wearing in Muslim countries

9	1/11	<p>Modern Mindfulness: How Buddhist is it?</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Samuel, G. (2015). The contemporary mindfulness movement and the question of nonself. <i>Transcultural Psychiatry</i>, 52(4), 485–500.</p> <p><Tutorial #3></p>	Buddhist meditation, modern secular mindfulness, evidence-based therapeutic concern
10	8/11	<p>Mind-body Relation in Daoism, Qigong Fever</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>David A. Palmer, “Chinese religious innovation in the Qigong movement: The case of Zhonggong,” Adam Yuet Chau ed., <i>Religion in Contemporary China: Revitalization and innovation</i>. NY: Routledge, 2011, pp. 182-202.</p> <p><Tutorial #4></p>	Scientific and therapeutic culture in contemporary religion, Daoist concept of mind-body relation
11	15/11	<p>New Age and New Religious Movements</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Serena Brink, “The New Age: A Modern Synthesis of Mysticism,” <i>Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity</i>, 1992, No. 15, Women and Health (1992): 7-11</p> <p><Tutorial #5></p>	New Age movement, New religious movements in Japan
12	22/11	<p>Transhumanism, Posthumanism and the Future of Religion</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Francesca Ferrando, “The Posthuman Divine: When Robots Can be Enlightened,” <i>Sophia</i> (2019) 58: 645-551.</p> <p>James J. Hughes, “Buddhism and Our Posthuman Future,” <i>Sophia</i> (2019) 58: 653-662.</p> <p><Tutorial #6></p>	Cyborg, Religion in the age of transhumanism and posthumanism
13	29/11	<p>Term Paper Consultation</p> <p><Tutorial #7></p>	

3. Learning Outcomes

3.1 Knowledge outcomes

- Understanding of the basic concepts and themes of religious studies.

- Understanding of the key moral, social and cultural issues in the contemporary life, globally and locally.
- Understanding of the relationship between religion and the human condition in the contemporary life.

3.2 Skill outcomes

- Ability to engage in analysis of religious phenomena in local and global contexts historically, sociologically and philosophically.
- Ability to articulate and critically examine one's position on moral, social and cultural issues in a pluralistic society.

3.3 Attitude outcomes

- Awareness of plurality and complexity within religious traditions in understanding doctrinal and moral issues arising in the contemporary world.
- Critical and sympathetic attitude in understanding religious phenomena.

4. Learning Activities

Lecture (hr) in /out class		Tutorial (hr) in /out class		Reading response (hr) in /out class		Final Paper (hr) in /out class	
2	3	1	2		2		2
M	M	M	M	NA	M	NA	M

M: Mandatory activity

O: Optional activity

NA: Not applicable

5. Assessment Scheme

Task	Percentage
Tutorial Attendance	10%
Tutorial Presentation	30%
Individual performance	15%
Group performance	15%
Term Paper	60%

5.1. Attendance (10%)

Students are required to attend all tutorial sessions. Students are encouraged to actively participate in discussions both in lectures and tutorials.

5.2. Tutorial Presentation (30%)

You will work in a group of 4 to 5 students for a tutorial presentation. From Week 7 onwards, in each week, a group will give a presentation on any topic related to religion and contemporary life. The presentation will use a real-life case to clarify, illustrate and further explore the concepts and issues raised in the lectures or readings. Students will also need to demonstrate how their presentation can facilitate their understanding of the nature and qualities of religion in general or a specific religion.

Each presentation will include a 10-minute session for Q&A and discussion. Assessment of this part will be based on group performance and individual performance of presentation and participation in discussion. The breakdown of the marks is as follows:

Presentation

- group performance: 15%
- individual performance: 15%

5.3. Term Paper (60%)

Students are required to write a term paper of 2,000-3,000 words (either in Chinese or English) on either one of the topics discussed in lectures or any other topic that is pertinent to the course subject. Papers will be graded according to their content, evidence, arguments, organization, and academic referencing style. (See the “Rubrics for Term Paper” for details.)

You need to submit both a soft copy and a hard copy of your paper. The soft copy should be submitted **by 11:59 pm on 6 Dec 2023 (Wed)** to *Blackboard Learn* and *VeriGuide* (See point #9 below). The hard copy should be submitted by **8 Dec, 2023 (Fri)**. Late submission will be penalized by deduction of marks.

6. **Learning resources for students**

The basic readings for the course are stated above. Other suggested readings, if any, will be given in class and through *Blackboard Learn*.

7. **Feedback for evaluation**

Students are welcome to give comments and feedback on the course through *Blackboard Learn* or personal exchanges with instructor and/or tutors. An end-of-term university wide course evaluation will be conducted in class.

8. **A facility for posting course announcements**

Course announcements, assignment, and feedback will be given through *Blackboard Learn*. All questions regarding the course could be posted on the discussion forum or via e-mails within the *Blackboard Learn*.

9. **Academic honesty and plagiarism**

Each student must upload a soft copy of the completed final paper to the plagiarism detection engine *VeriGuide*, at the URL: https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login_CUHK.jspx. **The system will issue a receipt that also contains a declaration of honesty. You must sign and attach the receipt to the paper you hand in.**