

## RELS5005 Theories of Religious Studies 宗教研究理論

Week 1-13 Wednesdays (7:00 - 9:30pm)

ELB\_401

**Instructor:** Dr. GUO Ting

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**Office:** KKB 213

**Office hours:** Wednesdays 5:30–6:30

### 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.

### Course 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

### Teaching Method

This course will consist of required readings, lectures, quizzes, discussions, and reflections. PDFs of the readings will be posted to the Blackboard. It is recommended that you print out the readings and read them on paper. If possible, bring the print-outs to class. Required videos, websites, and other materials will also be posted. You must complete the reading before each class.

Excused absences for religious holidays, illness, family or personal emergencies will be accommodated, and arrangements can be made to make up any missed work. Please inform Dr. Guo at the beginning of the semester of any expected absences.

### Student Contribution and Evaluation

Type of Assessment	Weighting	CILOs to be addressed	Description of Assessment Tasks
Attendance and Engagement	10%	1, 3	So that the students will acquire skills of analysis that you may apply to other academic classes and in everyday life and gain

			confidence in expressing yourself orally through classroom discussions and presentations.
Presentation	30%	1,3,5	To assess how well students have read selected readings, identified a specific issue and present their ideas and viewpoints in the presentation.
Research Paper	60%	1,2,3,4,5	To check if students are able to understand and analyze the texts.  The research paper aims to assess major learning outcomes achieved by students upon the completion of the course.

### **Active Participation and attendance 10%**

- Participation (10%)
- \* students may earn extra credit by attending academic events organised by the CRS

### **Literature Review (90%)**

- Presentation (30%)
- Written work (60%)
- Students will reflect on what we have learned throughout this course and compose a literature review of 2~3 pages (incl. references)
- You can choose any theory introduced in this course, with references mentioned in class and beyond
- Present your ideas in the final week and submit the written work before 9 Dec, 23:59:00.
- You will be able to use this for further studies
- Your research note should follow the academic format including single-sided, double-spaced with Times New Roman 12-point font, and should use Chicago Manual of Style.

### **Discussions**

Our classroom will be a respectful community space where all voices are valued. The course content may empower us or make us feel uncomfortable. We may disagree with the reading or with each other, but we should always listen to and respect one another.

We welcome a diversity of opinions, keeping in mind that arguments must be backed up with evidence. While I hope that you will continue our conversations on gender and sexuality outside the classroom, I ask that you do not identify individuals in these discussions. You may not record or film class lectures or discussions.

### **Language**

All readings will be in English and class lectures and discussions will be conducted in English and Chinese. Students may conduct small group discussions or group work in their preferred language, if all members agree and the choice of language (and the process of choosing a language) is inclusive. Assigned readings are in English, but students who find reading in translation helpful, may read translated works.

## Extra Credit

Students can earn extra credit toward their participation grade by attending academic events organised by the department (0.5 for each event). Students must attend the full event to receive extra credit and inform the professor about their intention of attending and share the notes taken about the event afterwards. Events are available on the department website (<http://www2.crs.cuhk.edu.hk/>), Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/RSCUHK>), and Instagram ([https://www.instagram.com/bars\\_cuhk/](https://www.instagram.com/bars_cuhk/), <https://www.instagram.com/cuhkccs/>, [https://www.instagram.com/bacs\\_cuhk/](https://www.instagram.com/bacs_cuhk/), <https://cloud.itsc.cuhk.edu.hk/mycuform/view.php?id=798007>).

## Recommended Resources:

- [Keeping it 101: A Killjoy's introduction to Religion Podcast](#)
- [Religious Studies Project podcast](#)
- [New Books Network: Religion](#)
- <https://newbooksnetwork.com/category/peoples-places/east-asian-studies>
- 时差 in-betweenness #12 宗教學：信仰，魔法，身份，權力 | Religious Studies: Marxist Feminism, Chaplaincy, Medicine, Magic, & Power: <https://shicha.buzzsprout.com/1171871/8766763-12-religious-studies-marxist-feminism-chaplaincy-medicine-magic-power>
- <https://www.instagram.com/hkfreetours/>

## Recommended readings:

*Religion in 50 Words: A Critical Vocabulary* (Accessible pocketbook for checking keywords in religious studies).

Martin, Craig. *Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Accessible analyses on key discussions).

*The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*. Edited by Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (Thoughtful appraisals).

*The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*.

*A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, 2nd Edition, edited by Michael Lambek, 2008 (A classic).

## Week 1 Intro 6 Sept

Recommended:

An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion with Grace Davie, *Religious Studies Project*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Pn1Sc3Y9jo>

## Week 2 Defining Religion 13 Sept

Martin, Craig. 2017. "Religion and the Problem of Definition." *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*, 1–18.

Will be mentioned in class:

- Asad, Talal. 1993. "Introduction." In *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.
- Yang, C.K. 1961. "Introduction." In *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

### **Week 3 Functionalism 20 Sept**

Readings:

*Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*. 2012. Edited by Anthony Giddens. Cambridge: CUP. Introduction.

Davie, Grace. 2004. "Chapter 5: The Evolution of the Sociology of Religion." In *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Michelle Dillon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Further reading:

Chau, Adam Yuet. 2006. *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Conclusion.

### **Week 4 Rationalization 27 Sept**

Weber, Max. 2004. "Introduction" and "Puritanism and the Spirit of Capitalism." In *The Essential Weber A Reader*, edited by Sam Whimster. New York: Routledge.

Further reading:

Tran, Jonathan. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*.

### **Week 5 Marxism 4 Oct**

Marx, Karl. 1845. "Ideology in General, German Ideology in Particular" and "First Premises of Materialist Method".

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1995 [1968]. *Marxism and Christianity*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. Revised edition with new Introduction, London: Duckworth, 1995.

Further reading:

Federici, Silvia. 2004. "Introduction." In *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 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），*结绳志*，2021。

### **Week 6 Ritual and Religious Actions 11 Oct**

Bell, Catherine. 2006. "Ritual." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Watts, Shea. 2018. "Ritualizing Bodies: Exploring Religious and Political Affects." *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* 4, no. 2: 33–52.

Further reading:

Sun, Anna. 2016. "A Sociological Consideration of Prayer and Agency." *Tdr/The Drama Review* 60, no. 4: 118–29.

### **Week 7 Rethinking Secularism 18 Oct**

Mahmood, Saba, 2016. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*. Princeton. Introduction.

Nedostup, Rebecca A. 2010. *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity*. Harvard. Introduction.

Further readings:

Bruce, Steve. Secularization. In *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*.

Yang, Mayfair. 2020. *Re-enchanting Modernity: Ritual Economy and Society in Wenzhou, China*. Duke.

Kang, Xiaofei. 2023. *Enchanted Revolution: Ghosts, Shamans, and Gender Politics in Chinese Communist Propaganda, 1942-1953*. OUP. Introduction.

### **Week 8 Intersectional Feminist Study of Religion 25 Oct**

Juschka, Darlene M. 2016. "Feminism and Gender Theory." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler.

Singh, Jakeet. "Religious Agency and the Limits of Intersectionality." *Hypatia* 30.4 (2015): 657–674.

Further reading:

Lai, Francisca Yuenki. 2020. *Maid to Queer: Asian Labor Migration and Female Same-Sex Desires*. HKU. Chpt 2.

Jia, Jinhua, Xiaofei Kang, and Ping Yao (eds.) 2015. *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body*. SUNY.

hooks, bell. 1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston, MA.: South end Press.

Gray, Biko Mandela and Ryan J. Johnson. 2022. *Phenomenology of Black Spirit*. Edinburgh. Introduction.

### **Week 9 Affect Theory 1 Nov**

"Affect" in *Religion in 50 Words*.

Hsu, Hua. 18 March 2019. "Affect Theory and the New Age of Anxiety," *The New Yorker*.

Schaefer, Donovan O. 2015. *Religious Affect*. Duke. Introduction.

Further reading:

Ahmed, Sara. 2014. "The Affective Politics of Fear." In Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 62–81. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Schaefer, Donovan O. 2019. *The Evolution of Affect Theory: The Humanities, the Sciences, and the Study of Power*. Cambridge.

### **Week 10 Authenticity and the WRP 8 Nov**

Owen, Suzanne. 2011. "The World Religions paradigm: Time for a change." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 10(3):253–268.

Choi, Hyaeweol. 2020. *Gender Politics at Home and Abroad: Protestant Modernity in Colonial-Era Korea*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1, "Ideology: "Wise Mother, Good Wife"."

Guo, Ting. 2023. "'Eastern Religions are More Spiritual'". In *Stereotyping Religion II: Critiquing Clichés*, edited by Brad Stoddard and Craig Martin. Bloomsbury.

### **Week 11 Religion and Modalities of Agency 15 Nov**

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2013. "Do Muslim Women (Still) Need Saving?" In *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 27–53. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mahmood, Saba. 2004. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press. Introduction.

### **Week 12 Religion and Science 22 Nov**

Schafer, Donovan O. 2022. *Wild Experiment: Feeling Science and Secularism after Darwin*. Duke. Conclusion.

Ni, Zhange. 2020. "Reimagining Daoist alchemy, decolonizing transhumanism: The fantasy of immortality cultivation in 21st c China." *Zygon* 55.3 (2020):748-71.

*Presentations begin during Week 12 tutorial*

### **Week 13 Presentations 29 Nov**

#### **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism**

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on honesty in academic work submitted by students, and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on cheating and plagiarism. Any related offence will lead to disciplinary action including termination of studies at the University. All student assignments in undergraduate and postgraduate programs should be submitted via VeriGuide: <https://veriguide2.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/cuhk/>.

#### **Rubrics**

- Presentation 30%
- Format for each presentation:
- Presenter: 15 minutes
- 10 % - Introduce a theory of your choosing;
- 10 % - Identify the key scholars on this theory;
- 10 % - Your evaluation of the development of the theory
- Written work 60%

A:

- 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.

B:

- 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.

C:

- 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.