

**The Chinese University of Hong Kong**  
**Department of Cultural and Religious Studies**  
**The First Semester, 2025-2026**  
*(Draft)*

- 1. Course Code** : RELS 5332  
**2. Title in English** : Religion and Contemporary Society  
**3. Title in Chinese** : 宗教與當代社會

**4. Course description**

The global resurgence of religion in recent decades invites a critical reexamination of the secularization thesis, which posits that religious influence diminishes with modernization. This course provides sociological training to interrogate such claims by equipping students with the theoretical tools and methodological frameworks essential for analyzing religion as a complex social institution. The first part of the course introduces foundational sociological theories—from Durkheim to contemporary critical approaches—that help explain religion's evolving social functions. Emphasis will be placed on understanding religion through core sociological concepts such as organization, gender, collective behavior, and international migration theories. Students will apply these theories to the analysis of diverse religious traditions, particularly in the socio-cultural contexts of Hong Kong and Asia. In the second part, students will develop analytical skills by exploring the organizational dynamics of religious institutions, the social mechanisms of religious practices and movements, and their entanglements with political authority, social change, and cultural conflict. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to critically assess religion's role in shaping social life using sociological inquiry and empirical reasoning.

**5. Learning Outcomes**

<b>Learning Outcomes (LOs)</b>	
Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:	
<b>LO1</b>	Describe and explain the key theoretical perspectives related to the study of religion.
<b>LO2</b>	Review a few religious traditions that are prevalent in the contexts of Hong Kong and Asia.
<b>LO3</b>	Critically examine the structure of religious organizations, practices, and movements.
<b>LO4</b>	Appraise the impact that religion has on society and politics.

**6. Course syllabus**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Fundamental concepts</b>
<b>Methods and Worldviews</b>	Collectiveness, sacred, representation.
<b>Economics and Religion</b>	Religion and ethics, values, and guided behaviors.
<b>Organizations and Collectivities</b>	Institutional changes, new religious movement.
<b>Religion and Gender</b>	Feminism, agency, and women's leadership.
<b>Individuals, Rituals, and Practices</b>	Conversion, religious rituals, and social rituals.
<b>Migration and Religion</b>	Transnationalism; globalization.
<b>Religion and Digitalized Media</b>	Religion, creativity, and social media
<b>Religion and Social Change</b>	History, Religion, and State
<b>Secularization</b>	Secularization, privatization, and secularity.
<b>Changing World Societies</b>	World societies, socially engaged religion.

## 7. Course components (Teaching modes and Learning activities)

### Distribution of Notional Learning Hours

Activity	Notional Learning Hours
<b>(a) Contact Hours</b>	
Lecture	23
Tutorial	10
Group Presentation	6
Consultation	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>(b) Self-Study Hours</b>	
Reading	24
Conduct Research and Prepare for Group Project Research Report	22
Multimedia resources and exercises	8
Conduct Research and Prepare for the Final Paper	26
<b>Total:</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>TOTAL NLHs: (a)+(b)</b>	<b>120</b>

## 8. Assessment type, percentage, and rubrics

Assessment Tasks (ATs)		Group	Individual
<b>AT1</b>	<b>Participation in Class Discussions:</b> Students are expected to have read the assigned readings and are encouraged to participate in class discussions actively.		15 %
<b>AT2</b>	<b>Group Presentation</b> In their groups of 2 people, students are required to present their group research project in 20 minutes based on the findings of their group project with research materials.	20%	5%
<b>AT3</b>	<b>Final paper</b> The final paper 4000-4500 words (English or 中文, word counts not including reference and footnotes,) which is due on <u>Dec 20 (23:59, 2025)</u> , takes the form of a <b>research proposal</b> : Choose a specific research problem in the research fields covered by the course that is of interest of you, review the relevant existing literature, derive expectations from existing theories, and propose data and methods that would allow settling controversial issues. All references must be credible and academic resources.		60%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	20%	80%

### Assessment Rubrics for ATs

**AT1: Participation in Class Discussions (15%)**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Grade</b>
- Extremely well prepared for class discussion; very active in sharing views; raises heuristic questions and offers critical evaluation of materials or viewpoints that take the class discussions further; contributes to discussions in a meaningful, insightful, and logical way, e.g., offers thoughtful clarification of views and ideas and responds thoughtfully and critically to other participants' views and ideas.	A
- Partially prepared for class discussion; quite active in sharing views; raises relevant questions and offers relevant comments on materials or viewpoints; both questions and comments are expressed clearly and succinctly; contributes to discussions in a constructive way, e.g. helps clarify the views and ideas of other participants, actively responds to other participants' views and ideas.	B
- Not well-prepared for class discussion; occasionally shares views; raises relevant questions and offers relevant comments on materials and viewpoints, but questions and comments are not clearly expressed; fails to contribute to discussions in a constructive way but keeps speaking up at appropriate times.	C
- Unprepared for class discussion and infrequently shares views; raises irrelevant questions and comments; does not contribute to discussions and speaks at inappropriate times. Sometimes sidetracks the discussions.	D
- Always being silent in class and never speaking up in discussion, demonstrates antagonistic and uncooperative attitudes towards other participants without any logical and sensible reason.	E/F

**AT2: Group Presentation (20+5=25%)**

<b>Criteria for the Group Performance (20%)</b>	<b>Grade</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The presentation is very clear; the content is well covered; the points are well connected, and the arguments are clear and logical.</li> <li>- References are very sufficient and well formatted.</li> <li>- Clearly demonstrates reflection and undertakes critical evaluations of knowledge.</li> <li>- Critically reviews and consolidates a systematic and coherent body of knowledge in presentation.</li> <li>- Discussion questions are very well prepared and can stimulate classmates' participation.</li> <li>- Speaks confidently in a vivid way with enthusiasm, eye contact is used to gauge reactions and understanding.</li> <li>- Finishes the presentation within a given period of time.</li> </ul>	A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The presentation is clear; content is well covered; arguments are clear and logical.</li> <li>- References are sufficient with reasonably good formats.</li> <li>- Demonstrates reflection in presentation.</li> <li>- Reviews and consolidates a systematic body of knowledge in presentation.</li> <li>- Discussion questions are well prepared, and classmates' participation is reasonably good.</li> </ul>	B

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Speaks with a clear voice; occasionally promotes interest through eye contact.</li> <li>- Exceeds the time allowed for the presentation.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The presentation is somewhat clear, content is by and large covered; the structure is understandable; the evidence is appropriate.</li> <li>- Reviews and consolidates a body of knowledge in presentation.</li> <li>- Discussion questions are prepared, and some classmates participate in the discussion.</li> <li>- Speaks with a clear voice.</li> <li>- Exceeds the time allowed for the presentation or finishes it significantly early.</li> </ul>	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The presentation is poorly organized.</li> <li>- Evidence and examples are presented inconsistently.</li> <li>- Presents a body of knowledge, but the content is loosely connected and incomplete.</li> <li>- Speaks with a clear voice.</li> <li>- Finishes the presentation significantly early or exceeds the time limit.</li> </ul>	D
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The structure and content of the presentation are extremely poor.</li> <li>- Very unclearly focused.</li> <li>- Arguments are weak or non-existent.</li> <li>- Lacks evidence and examples to support ideas.</li> <li>- Discussion questions are unprepared, and classmates' participation is low;</li> <li>- The audience finds it very hard to understand the presentation.</li> </ul>	E/F
<b>Criteria for Individual Performance (5%)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very clear oral and PPT presentation</li> <li>- Consistently speaks clearly, distinctly, loudly, and slowly enough for the audience to hear and process ideas presented</li> <li>- Very appropriate use of body language (inc. eye contact)</li> <li>- Exceptional responsiveness to the audience.</li> </ul>	A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The oral and PPT presentations are clear.</li> <li>- Speaks with a clear voice.</li> <li>- Sometimes it promotes interest through eye contact.</li> <li>- Able to respond to the audience.</li> </ul>	B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The oral and PPT presentations are somewhat clear.</li> <li>- Speaks with a clear voice.</li> <li>- Occasionally promotes interest through eye contact.</li> <li>- Attempts to respond to the audience;</li> </ul>	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The oral and PPT presentations are poorly delivered without a clear voice.</li> <li>- Presents a body of knowledge, but not always appropriate.</li> <li>- Does not respond to the audience;</li> </ul>	D
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The oral and PPT presentations are very unclearly focused.</li> <li>- The voice is not clear at all.</li> <li>- No eye contact with the audience to promote interest.</li> <li>- Does not respond to the audience at all.</li> </ul>	E/F

**AT3 Final paper (60%)**

Criteria	Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The paper is very well structured, and the writing is very clear with very good use of language.</li> <li>The content is well covered, and the points are well connected. The content is perfectly connected with the essay title.</li> <li>Arguments are very clear and logical with appropriate empirical evidence/examples.</li> <li>References are very sufficient and well formatted.</li> </ul>	A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The paper is well structured, and the writing is clear with good use of language.</li> <li>The content is sufficiently covered, clearly connected with the title of the essay, and there are connections among the points.</li> <li>Arguments are clear and logical with appropriate empirical evidence/examples.</li> <li>References are sufficient with reasonably good formats.</li> </ul>	B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The writing is reasonably proper.</li> <li>The content is mostly covered, but it doesn't connect well with the essay title.</li> <li>References are partially sufficient, and arguments are made with little empirical support.</li> <li>The organization of ideas is somewhat unclear, and an analysis shows some understanding of quoted material; arguments are not entirely clear, and there are some problems with transitions.</li> </ul>	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The writing standards, content, and structure of the paper are below average.</li> <li>Weak and unclear arguments, weak transitions, and being too descriptive (rather than making an analysis).</li> <li>Insufficient references.</li> </ul>	D
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The essay is poorly structured, and the writing is unclear.</li> <li>Almost unreadable due to major problems with structure, analysis, and mechanics, e.g., grammatical mistakes, and poor citation of sources.</li> <li>Commits plagiarism.</li> </ul>	E/F

**9. Required readings**

- Barker, Eileen. (1999). New Religious Movements: Their Incidence and Significance. In *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, ed. Bryan Wilson and Jamie Cresswell London: Routledge. pp. 15-32.
- David A. Palmer, Glenn Shive, and Philip L. Wickeri. (2011) *Chinese Religious Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. (1995). Introduction and Chapter One. In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-18.
- Furseth, Inger and Pal Repstad. (2016). Sociological Perspectives on Religion. In *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Abington: Taylor & Francis, pp. 1-7.
- Hervieu-Leger, Daniele. (2003) Individualism, the Validation of Faith, and the Social Nature of Religion in Sociology. In the *Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, ed. Richard Fenn, Blackwell Publishing. pp. 161- 175.
- Huang, Weishan. (2016) "WeChat Together about Buddha: The Construction of Sacred Space and Religious Community in Shanghai through Social Media" in *Religion and Media in China*. ed. Stefania Travagnin. London: Routledge. pp. 110-128.
- Jose Casanova, (1994). Chapter One in *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago. pp. 11-39.

- Julia Huang, Elena Valussi, and David A. Palmer. (2011) Gender and
- Lecture:
- Madsen, Richard. (2007). *Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Max Weber. (2005) Introduction and Chapter One - Religious Affiliation and Social Stratification. in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Routledge, pp. xxiv-xlii. pp. 3-12.
- Nielsen, Donald. (2003). Transformation of Society and the Sacred in Durkheim's Religious Sociology". In the *Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, ed. Richard Fenn, Blackwell Publishing, pp. 120-131.
- Piasecki, Stefan. (2016) "Redemption through Annihilation?! - Game Designer's Views on Religion, Culture and Society and Its Influence on Digital Games." *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*. Volume 10(2016): 45-73.
- Religion Watch. "AI as a Dehumanizing or Desecularizing Force?" June 2023, VOL. 38, No. 8.
- Rochford, E. Burke. (2007) Social Building Blocks of New Religious Movements: Organization and Leadership. In *Teaching New Religious Movements*. ed. David G. Bromley. The American Academy of Religion and Oxford University Press. pp. 159-185.
- Saba Mahmood. (2001) Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival. *Cultural Anthropology* 16.2(2001): 202-236.
- Smith, Christian. 2008. "Future Directions in the Sociology of Religion." *Social Forces*, 98(4): 1561-1589.
- Wuthnow, Robert. (2003) Studying Religion, Making it Sociological. in *The Handbook of Sociology of Religion*. ed. Dillon, Michele. Cambridge University Press, pp. 16-30.
- Yang, Mayfair. (2021). *Chinese Religio- Environmentalism Ethics and Practice*, edited by Mayfair Yang. Rowman & Littlefield.

## 10. Feedback for evaluation

Students will receive feedback on their assignments during the weekly tutorial discussions, before and after group presentations, and during office hours.

## 11. Course schedule

Class/ week	Date	Topic	Requirements
1	Sep 6	<b>Introduction and Overview</b>	• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.
2	Sep 13	<b>Methods and Worldviews</b>	• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.
3	Sep 20	<b>Economics and Religion</b>	• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.
4	Sep 27	<b>Organizations and Collectivities</b>	• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.
5	Oct 4	<b>Religion and Gender</b>	• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.
6	Oct 11	<b>Individuals, Rituals, and Practices</b>	• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.

	Oct 18		No class
7	Oct 25	<b>Migration and Religion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit the list of teammates.</li> <li>• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.</li> </ul>
8	Nov 1	<b>Religion and Digitalized Media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.</li> </ul>
9	Nov 8	<b>Religion and Social Change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the presentation outline with the instructor.</li> <li>• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.</li> </ul>
10	Nov 15	<b>Secularization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the presentation outline with the instructor.</li> <li>• Read the first assigned article and prepare for the tutorial discussion.</li> </ul>
11	Nov 22	<b>Student presentation 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit PPTs the night before the presentation.</li> <li>• Discuss the research subject for the final paper with the instructor.</li> </ul>
12	Nov 29	<b>Student presentation 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit PPTs the night before the presentation.</li> <li>• Discuss the research subject for the final paper with the instructor.</li> </ul>
13	Dec 6 (classroom TBC)	<b>Conclusion: Changing World Societies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the research subject for the final paper with the instructor</li> </ul>
	Dec 15		Deadline for the final paper.

## 12. Contact details for teacher(s) or TA(s)

<b>Professor/Lecturer/Instructor:</b>	
Name:	Weishan HUANG
Office Location:	TBA
Telephone:	TBA
Email:	TBA
Teaching Venue:	HYS_G05
Website:	TBA

## 13. Details of the course website

Related course materials are delivered via the platform **“BLACKBOARD”**  
(<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/eLearning/>)

## 14. 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 have 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.

The copyright of the teaching materials, including lecture notes, assignments and examination questions, etc., produced by staff members/ teachers of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) belongs to CUHK. Students may download the teaching materials produced by the staff members/ teachers from the Learning Management Systems, e.g. Blackboard, adopted by CUHK for their own educational use, but shall not distribute/ share/ copy the materials to a third-party without seeking prior permission from the staff members/ teachers concerned.

## **15. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

Approach 3 - Use of AI tools is allowed with explicit acknowledgement and proper citation. (Please refer to Approach 3 Appendix for further details.)

## **16. Guideline on sharing lecture recordings**

Attention is drawn to the following:

- The copyright of any lecture recordings shared in the course, whether they are produced by teachers, students, or peer note-takers, belongs to the University.
- Students should not share these recordings with others without obtaining prior written consent from the teacher(s).



### Approach 3 - Use only with explicit acknowledgement

In courses where students are allowed or expected to collaborate with or use AI tools for in-class learning activities or assignments, students should be reminded to make explicit acknowledgement of the use of these tools. Teachers may show students examples regarding how to acknowledge and make citations. Students should also be informed of the limitations and appropriate use of these tools.

#### **Use of AI tools is 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.

- i. 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.).*

- ii. An example of citation

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

(Students are reminded that due to the rapid developments of generative AI tools, some citation formats may be updated regularly.)

- iii. An example of including texts generated by an AI tool in their work

"The following text was generated by an AI tool / language model (ChatGPT):"  
[Insert the text generated by ChatGPT here.]

- iv. 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.