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

CURE1111 THE STUDY OF RELIGION

2025-26 Second Term

Class Time	Mon 14:30 – 16:15 (Lecture Class) Mon 16:40 – 17:15 (Tutorial Class)
Classroom	Lee Shau Kee Rm 306 (Lecture Class)
Teacher:	Dr. CHOW Wai Yin (Dept of CRS) Email: wychow@cuhk.edu.hk
Office Hours:	9.30am-5.30pm (Mon-Fri) by appointment

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

Week	Content
1 5/1	**Course Introduction** ❿ Kessler, Gary E. "Thinking about Being a Student of Religion." In *Studying Religion: An Introduction through Cases*, Chap. 1.
2 12/1	**Foundational Questions in Religious Inquiry** ❿ Kessler, Gary E. "Sacred Power." In *Studying Religion: An Introduction through Cases*, Chap. 3.
3	**Émile Durkheim and the Social Functions of Religion**

19/1	➓ Titus Hjelm. "Sociology of Religion." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, edited by Robert A. Segal and Nickolas P. Roubekas, Part I, chap. 7. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2021. ➓ Kessler, Gary E. "Organizing the Sacred." In *Studying Religion: An Introduction through Cases*, Chap. 11.
4 26/1	**Sigmund Freud and Religion as Psychological Phenomenon** ➓ Main, Roderick. "Psychology of Religion." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, edited by Robert A. Segal and Nickolas P. Roubekas, Part I, chap. 6. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2021. ➓ Kessler, Gary E. "Experiencing the Sacred." In *Studying Religion: An Introduction through Cases*, chap. 7.
5 2/2	**Eliade's Phenomenology of the Sacred: Understanding Religion through Sacred Time and Space** ➓ Kessler, Gary E. "Sacred Space and Time." In *Studying Religion: An Introduction through Cases*, chap. 6. ➓ Eliade, Mircea. "Sacred Time" & "Sacred Place." In Greeley, Andrew. *Sociology and religion: A collection of readings*. HarperCollins College Publ., 1995.
6 9/2	**Victor Turner's Ritual Theory of Religion** ➓ Livingston, James C. "Sacred Ritual." In *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion*, 74–95. ➓ Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969. 106–8, 166–203.
7 16/2	**Lunar New Year Vacation – No Class**
8 23/2	**Study Religion in Pluralistic Contexts** ➓ Kessler, "Religious Diversity and Truth," *Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases*, Chapter 13. ➓ Wilkinson, Michael. "Globalization." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, edited by Robert A. Segal and Nickolas P. Roubekas. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2021. Part I, Chapter 6.
9 2/3	**Reading Week – No Class**
10 9/3	**Fieldwork Methods in Religious Studies – *Guest Lecture*** ➓ Gregg, Ruby, and Helen Scholefield. *Engaging with Living Religion: A Guide to Fieldwork in the Study of Religion*. London: Sage, 2015. Chap. 1.
11 16/3	**Content Analysis in Religious Studies** ➓ Diane M. Badzinski, Robert H. Woods, and Chad M. Nelson, "Content Analysis," chap. 2.4 in Steven Engler and Michael Stausberg, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion.* London: Routledge, 2021.

12 23/3	**Fieldwork Study (To Be Confirmed)**
13 30/3	**Group Presentation #1-4**
14 6/4	**Public holiday: The day following Ching Ming Festival – No Class**
15 13/4	**Group Presentation #4-8**

4. 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

5. Assessment Scheme

Tasks	**Weight**
Participation and Tutorial Class Discussion	10 + 10%
Field Trip Participation	10%
Reading Reflection	35%
Group Presentation	35%

5.1 Participation & Tutorial Discussion (10 + 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 Reading Reflection (35%)

- For this assignment, you will select **3 - 4** academic readings (journal articles or book chapters) that focus on one key aspect of religion. You may choose from topics such as the sacred, religious myths, rituals, symbols, beliefs, or practices.

- Your task is to:
  - **Summarize** what each author argues or finds in their research.
  - **Compare** and connect the readings — look for similarities, differences, and key themes.
  - **Reflect** from your perspective — explain how you understand these ideas, and discuss what they reveal about how religion functions or is studied in society.
- You are encouraged to write in your own voice while showing understanding of the academic work. Focus on clarity, organization, and critical thinking rather than simply describing each text.
- Assessment criteria:
  - Understanding of the chosen topic and readings.
  - Ability to summarize and link ideas clearly.
  - Depth of reflection and independent thinking.
  - Clarity of writing and proper referencing (APA Style or Chicago Manual of Style).
- Word limit: Approximately 2,000 words
- Submission: Submit electronically to VeriGuide before class and hand in printed copy with VeriGuide receipt on **31 March 2026**.

5.4 Group Presentation (35%)

- You will work in groups of 3–4 students to explore one or two key dimensions of a religious phenomenon using the theories and concepts learned in this course.
- Task:
  - Each group will deliver a 25-minute presentation that explains your research findings. The study topic can focus on:
  - A religious group or community (historical or contemporary)
  - A religious site or institution
  - A religious practice, ritual, or symbol
- Approach:
  - Select your topic. Choose a phenomenon that interests your group and define the one or two religious dimensions you want to explore (for example, ritual, myth, ethics, or belief).
  - Conduct background research. Provide a brief overview of its historical background — including origins, founders, beliefs, practices, and community characteristics.
  - Apply course concepts. Use theories and ideas from the course to interpret and explain your findings. Consider how these religious dimensions shape the lives of practitioners — both individually and collectively — and how they interact with broader social and cultural contexts.
  - Organize and present. Structure your presentation clearly with an introduction, main points, and conclusion. Ensure all group members contribute meaningfully.
- Assessment criteria
  - Use of relevant theories and concepts.
  - Clarity and depth of analysis.
  - Team collaboration and organization.
  - Effectiveness and engagement of the presentation.
- Submission: Submit electronically to VeriGuide and Blackboard **after your group presentation**.

6. Assignment Grading

Please see the marking rubrics upload on Blackboard.

Grade A:

- The assignment demonstrates a thorough understanding of the concepts and ideas being presented.
- The concepts are clearly applied and well-developed throughout the paper.

- The paper presents an innovative project that is relevant to the topic and demonstrates creativity and originality.
- The writing is clear, concise, and engaging, with proper grammar and syntax.

Grade B:

- The assignment demonstrates a good understanding of the concepts and ideas being presented.
- The concepts are applied well throughout the paper, but may not be as fully developed as in an A grade paper.
- The writing is clear and concise, with proper grammar and syntax.

Grade C:

- The assignment demonstrates a basic understanding of the concepts and ideas being presented, but may not demonstrate a full understanding of the material.
- The concepts may not be applied as clearly as in higher grade papers and may require further explanation or elaboration.
- The writing may be less clear and may contain errors in grammar and syntax.

7. Feedback for evaluation

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

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 (Approach 3)

- Students may use AI tools for class activities and assignments only with explicit acknowledgement and proper citation.
- All use of generative AI (text, images, data, etc.) must be clearly stated and cited when incorporated into the work.
- Example acknowledgement:
  "I acknowledge the use of [AI tool name, e.g., ChatGPT (https://chat.openai.com/)] to [state support, e.g., generate ideas, plan my essay]."
- Example citation:

  OpenAI. (2023). ChatGPT (Mar 20 version). https://chat.openai.com/chat
- When using AI-generated text, indicate it clearly, e.g.,
  "The following text was generated by an AI tool (ChatGPT):"

[Insert AI-generated text]

- Or, include the prompt with the AI-generated text:
  "[The prompt], as generated by an AI language model (ChatGPT):"

  [Insert AI-generated text]

- Students should use AI tools responsibly, be aware of limitations, and consult the course teacher if uncertain.

11. Guideline on sharing lecture recordings

- 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).

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. Reading List:

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

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.

Segal, Robert Alan, and Nickolas P. Roubekas, eds. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*. Second edition. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2021.

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

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.