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

CURE 2144 Life and Death in World Religions

Second Semester 2025-2026

Instructor: Dr. Chow Wai Yin (周惠賢博士)	Lecture Time: Tue 10.30 - 12:15 Tutorial Class: Tue 12.30 - 13:15
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Office Hours: 9.30am-5.30pm (Mon-Fri) by appointment	

1. Course Description

Life is a learning process of facing death. In this process, death provides opportunities to reflect the whole meaning of life. These ideas are developed by different cultural and religious systems, which are usually transmitted through (oral) literature and rituals. Related themes include body and soul, good life and a good death, and meaning of life, etc.

This course will take a thematic approach to examine the issues related to life and death in some major religions in the world, including the Chinese, Indian, and Abrahamic traditions. Through interactive lectures and creative group projects, students will be offered an opportunity to examine the psycho-socio-spiritual, ethical and political issues of mortality through a range of religious-cultural traditions. Such exploration will facilitate insights, reflections, and personal growth to enhance students' capacity to deal with the themes of loss, death, dying, and bereavement.

人生是一個面對死亡的學習過程。在這個過程中，死亡提供了反思生命意義的機會。這些思想由不同的文化和宗教系統發展起來，通常透過（口頭）文學和儀式傳播。相關主題包括身體與靈魂、好生好死、生命的意義等。生與死是文化及宗教的重要關注，通常透過（口傳）文本和禮儀來傳達。與生死相關的主題包括身體與靈魂，善生與善死與生命意義等等。

本課程以主題研究為進路，通過對宗教教義、文獻、禮儀和象徵等方面的考察，了解世界三大宗教傳統(包括印度、中國與亞伯拉罕傳統)的生死觀。透過互動講課和創意小組報告，學生將有機會通過不同宗教文化傳統，從心理、社會、心靈、倫理和政治層面探索死亡議題。這種探索將促進學生反思失去、死亡、垂死和喪親等主題的能力。

2. Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand key issues and perspectives on life and death across major world religions, including their historical roots and how they apply in modern contexts.
- Cultivate a critical yet empathetic appreciation of how different religious traditions interpret and respond to the realities of life and death.
- Engage in critical analysis of religious teachings, texts, and rituals related specifically to life, death,

the afterlife, and ethical questions surrounding mortality.

3. Learning Activities

Lecture (hr) in /out class		Tutorial Presentation & Discussion (hr) in /out class		Tutorial presentation (hr) in /out class		workshop (hr) in /out class		Course Reading (hr) in /out class		Written Assignment (hr) / course in /out class	
2 per week			1 hr per week	1 in the semester					3 hr per week		10 hours
M	NA	M	NA	M	NA	NA	M	NA	M	NA	M

M: Mandatory activity in the course O: Optional activity NA: Not applicable

4. Class Schedule

Class	Topic	Study Question / Presentation Arrangement
1 6/1	**Introduction: Universal Questions of Life and Death**	What personal experiences or cultural narratives shape our views on life and death?
2 13/1	**Ancient Egypt: Cycles of Life, Death, and Afterlife** Weekly Reading: Assmann, J. (2005). *Afterword. In Death and salvation in ancient Egypt* (pp. 379-391). Cornell University Press.	How do ancient religious traditions understand the cycle of life and death, and the soul's journey beyond death?
3 20/1	**Hinduism: Samsara and Liberation (Moksha)** Weekly Reading: Hopkins, T. J. (1992). Hindu views on life and death. In *Death and afterlife: Perspectives of world religions* (Chapter 10). Greenwood Press.	How do cycles of life, death, and rebirth shape life choices?
4 27/1	**Judaism: Covenant, Resurrection, and the Afterlife** Weekly Reading: 林中澤. (2014). 超越死亡：古代猶太人的死亡觀及其歷史演變. 《歷史研究》, (5), 7–28.	What does it mean to live a life of covenant and ethical responsibility?
5 3/2	**Early Christianity: Redemption and Eternal Life through Christ** Weekly Reading: Obayashi, H. (1992). Death and eternal life in Christianity. In H. Obayashi (Ed.), *Death and afterlife: Perspectives of world religions* (pp. 149–163). Greenwood Press. 林中澤, & 陳賢哲. (2011). 早期拉丁教父的死亡觀評析. 暨南學報 (哲學社會科學版), 2, 144-152.	How do beliefs about redemption affect forgiveness and relationships?
6	**Field Trip Study on 7 Feb (To Be Confirmed)**	

10/2		
7 17/2	**No Class: Lunar New Year Vacation**	
8 24/2	**Understanding of Life and Death in Early Chinese Religions: Settling the Dead** Weekly Reading: 林素英. (2001). 先秦儒家的喪葬觀. 《漢學研究》, 19(2), 83- 112. https://ccs.ncl.edu.tw/Chinese_studies_19_2/83_112.pdf	How does filial piety and ancestor respect influence identity and morality?
9 3/3	**No Class – Reading Week**	
10 10/3	**Understanding of Life and Death in Taoism: Harmony with Nature and the Flow of Life** Weekly Reading: Angelika Cedzich, "Ghost and Demons, Law and Order: Grave Quelling Tests and Early Taoist Liturgy," *Taoist Resources* 4 (1993) no.2, 23-35. 黎志添：〈從打齋儀式看道教對死亡的處理 ----- 一個死魂遠遊旅程的救濟：拔罪、救苦、度亡及成仙〉，收入梁美儀、張燦輝合編：《凝視死亡──死與人間的多元省思》。香港：中文大學出版社，2005，頁 55-78。	How can harmony with natural cycles ease fear of death? *Presentation 1
11 17/3	**Celebrating Life and Death in Mexico: Honoring Ancestors, Community Bonds, and the Eternal Cycle** Weekly Reading: Brandes, S. H. (2007). Mexica Views of Death. In *Skulls to the Living, Bread to the Dead: The Day of the Dead in Mexico and Beyond* (pp. 181-194). Blackwell Publishing.	How do religious celebrations, such as Día de los Muertos, help individuals and communities honor ancestors, cope with death, and understand life as part of a cyclical process? *Presentation 2
12 24/3	**Ethical Challenges in Life and Death** Weekly Reading: Anthony, F. V., & Sterkens, C. (2019). Religion and the Right to (Dispose of) Life: A Study of the Attitude of Christian, Muslim and Hindu Students in India Concerning Death Penalty, Euthanasia and Abortion. In *Euthanasia, Abortion, Death Penalty and Religion – The Right to Life and its Limitations. International Empirical Research* (pp. 13-64). Springer.	How do religious ethics inform contemporary dilemmas like euthanasia and abortion? *Presentation 3
13 31/3	*Presentation 4 -7	
14 7/4	**No Class - The day following Easter Monday**	
15	*Presentation 8-10	

14/4		

Cann, Candi K. *Death and Religion: The Basics.* London, England ; Routledge, 2023.

Ōbayashi, and Ōbayashi, Hiroshi. *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions.* New York: Greenwood, 1992.

5. Assessment

Class Participation + Discussion (%)	Field Trip Reflection (%)	Reading Journal Reflection (%)	Presentation and Discussion (%)
10 + 10	20	25	30%

A. Class Participation (10%) and Tutorial Discussion (10%)

- Your active participation in lectures and tutorials is key! Share your ideas, ask questions, respond respectfully to peers, and attend punctually.
- Both attendance and meaningful contributions count in lecture and tutorial classes. Being **over 15 minutes late** will reduce your mark by 0.3%. Let us know if you **arrive late** to avoid being marked absent.

B. Field Trip Reflection (20%)

- Visit the M+ Museum's ancient Egypt exhibit focused on life and death rituals.
- Write a reflection **within 1,000 words** on how this visit enhanced your understanding of religious views on life, death, and their social or ethical significance.
- This assignment connects what you learn in class with real-world cultural experiences.
- Date for Submission: **24 Feb 2026 in class**

C. Reading Reflection (25%)

- Choose **3** weekly readings on the meaning/value of life, death and dying, and the afterlife/rebirth/ultimate destiny.
- Readings may be from the same or different religious traditions. For each reading, include:
  - ***Summary of core beliefs (250–350 words):*** Describe what life is for, what death means, and what happens after death based on the specific text.
  - ***Personal critical reflection (250–300 words)***: Analyze how the beliefs resonate with or challenge your assumptions or experiences with reasons and tensions.
  - ***Ethical implications (150–200 words):*** Discuss how beliefs might influence ethical decisions in at least two areas like euthanasia, mourning rituals, or organ donation.
  - ***Overall integration (150–200 words):*** Summarize key learning from religious perspectives on life, death, and the afterlife, and reflect on their impact on your thinking or future informed decisions.
- Additional Requirements:
  - Word count: The total word count for the reflection is **1,200–1,500 words** in Chinese (excluding references and heading). For English, the word count should be about 85% of the Chinese count, which means approximately 1,020–1,275 words.
  - Format: Typed, **printed on double-sided pages**, double-spaced, 12-point font, standard margins,

with student name, ID, course code, and assignment title on the first page.

- Submission: Submit electronically to VeriGuide before class and hand in printed copy with VeriGuide receipt on **31 March 2026**.

D. Presentation on Artefacts and Life/Death Concepts (35%)

- **4-5 students** in a group. Select **one or more** religious artefacts related to life and death (e.g., Hindu funeral model, Buddhist prayer wheel, Day of the Dead altar).

- Prepare **a 20–25 minute presentation** with visuals that covers:
  - ***Description*** and cultural/religious context of the artefact(s).
  - ***Explanation*** of the life and death beliefs the artefact represents.
  - ***How*** it communicates ideas about mortality, afterlife, or ethics.
  - This helps you explore how tangible objects express complex spiritual ideas.

- 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. References

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Sharma, Arvind, ed. *Our Religions*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

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13. Films/DVD

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