Topics in East Asian Religion:  
Death, Dying, and the Afterlife in East Asian Religions

Wed., Fri. 10:00 - 11:30  
Seigle Hall, Room 205

Instructor: Dr. Geoffrey Goble  
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Office: Busch Hall 102  
Office hours: W 1:00-2:00, R 10:00-12:00, and by appointment

Course Description

In this course we will explore various ways East Asian religious traditions deal with death and the dead. We will examine how the Daoist, Buddhist, and folk traditions of East Asia historically and currently address the question of “What happens when we die?” We will look at different ritual practices surrounding death, dying, and the dead in their ongoing relationships with the living. We will also explore various descriptions of the terrain of the afterlife or postmortem world by critically engaging a variety of textual and visual records of China, Korea, and Japan. Some of the topics that will be discussed in the course include the nature of the self, the function of funerary rites, the geography of the afterlife, communication with the dead, and religious notions of salvation/liberation. By exploring a variety of narratives and practices regarding death and the afterlife, students will develop a rich and detailed picture of the relationship between the living and the dead in the East Asian religious landscape.

Course Requirements

Preparation, Attendance, & Engagement

20% of your final course grade will be determined by your regular preparation, attendance, and participation in class. Frequent absence, failure to prepare, and reluctance to participate in class discussion will negatively affect the quality of our educational experience and will negatively affect your final course grade.

Mid-term exam [Oct. 15]

30% of your final course grade will be determined by a mid-term exam. This will be a take-home exam that asks you to write 10-12 pages synthesizing and critically analyzing material and topics introduced and discussed in the first half of our course. We will discuss and determine the content and format of the mid-term exam as a class.

Semester Research Paper
50% of your final course grade will be determined by a 20-25 page semester paper. We will not have a final exam. In order to facilitate steady work aimed at producing the highest quality essay, a series of benchmark assignments will precede final submission of the semester paper. As a whole, this research project will determine 50% of your final course grade, but will consist of three separate benchmarks:

- Proposal and Prospectus (10%); due Oct. 31
- Initial Draft (10%); due Nov. 21
- Final Draft (30%); due Dec. 15

Expectations and guidelines for each of these benchmark elements will be provided in advance of their respective due dates.

**Course Materials**


- All required texts are on 2-hour Reserve in Olin Library

Additional required readings, marked with an asterisk (*) in the course schedule below, are available on our Blackboard class-site.

**Course Schedule**

**Theoretical Perspectives**

Aug. 27 (Wed): Course Introduction
Aug. 29 (Fri): Theoretical Perspectives on Death, Dying, and the Afterlife
  *Reading*: Death – Anthropological, Clinical, Humanistic, Philosophical, Psychological, and Sociological Perspectives

**Early China**

Sept. 3 (Wed): Burial and the Afterlife in Ancient China
  *Reading*: Mortality pp 13-84 (“Preparation for the Afterlife” & “Ascend to Heaven or Stay in the Tomb?”)

Sept. 5 (Fri): Death in Ancient China
  *Reading*: Mortality pp 117-136 (“War, Death, and Ancient Chinese Cosmology”)

Sept. 10 (Wed): Death in Classical Confucianism  
**Reading:** *Mortality* pp 137-176 (“Death and Dying in the Analects” & “I Know not ‘Seems’”)  
Sept. 12 (Fri): Conceptualizing Death  
**Reading:** *Mortality* pp 177-190 (“Allotment and Death in Early China”)  

**MEDIEVAL CHINA**  
Sept. 17 (Wed): The Changing Afterlife  
**Reading:** Bokenkamp, pp 1-59  
Sept. 19 (Fri): The Changing Afterlife  
**Reading:** Bokenkamp, pp 60-94  
Sept. 24 (Wed): The Changing Afterlife  
**Reading:** Bokenkamp, pp 95-157  
Sept. 26 (Fri): The Changing Afterlife  
**Reading:** Bokenkamp, pp 158-192  

Oct. 1 (Wed): The Buddhist Afterlife and Ghost Festival  
**Reading:** Teiser – “Having Once Died and Returned to Life’: Representations of Hell in Medieval China” (32 pages)  
**Reading:** Teiser – “Ghosts and Ancestors in Medieval Chinese Religion: The Yü-lan-p’en Festival as Mortuary Ritual” (20 pages)  
Oct. 3 (Fri): The Elite Buddhist Dead  
**Reading:** Strong – “The Buddha’s Funeral” (19 pages)  

Oct. 8 (Wed): Contemporary Buddhist Funerary Practices  
**Reading:** Chen - “Buddhist passports to the other world”  
**Reading:** Scott – *For Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors: The Chinese Tradition of Paper Offerings* [selection]  
Oct. 10 (Fri): Review and Synopsis  
**Film:** “A Month of Hungry Ghosts”  

Oct. 15 (Wed): Midterm Exam  
Oct. 17 (Fri) – **Fall Break**  

**KOREA**  
Oct. 22 (Wed): Changing Perceptions of Death in Korea  
**Reading:** *in Korea* pp 21-82 (“Death and Burial in Medieval Korea” & “Making Death ‘Modern’”)
Oct. 24 (Fri): Death and Burial in Koryŏ and Modern Korea  
Reading: *in Korea* pp 83-136 (“Ways of Burial” & “Death as Nationalist Text”)

Oct. 29 (Wed): Ancestral Worship and Rites in Chosŏn Korea  
Reading: *in Korea* pp 137-170 (“Shamanic Rites for the Dead” & “The Familiar Dead”)  
Oct. 31 (Fri): Ghosts and the Afterlife  
Reading: *in Korea* pp 171-189 (“Ghostly Encounters”)

Proposal and Prospectus Due

JAPAN

Nov. 5 (Wed): The Dead in Early Japan  
*Reading:* Ebersole – “Tama Belief and Practice in Ancient Japan”  
*Reading:* Gardiner – “Japan’s First Shingon Services for the Dead”

Nov. 7 (Fri): The Dead in Early Japan  

Nov. 12 (Wed): Death and Funerals in Medieval Japan  
*Reading:* Gerhart – “Death in the Fourteenth Century” and “Funerals in the Fifteenth Century” (67 pages)

Nov. 14 (Fri): Funerals in Zen Buddhism  
*Reading:* Bodiford – “Zen Funerals” (24 pages)

Nov. 19 (Wed): “Funerary Buddhism” in Contemporary Japan  
Reading: Rowe pp 1-68

Nov. 21 (Fri): “Funerary Buddhism” in Contemporary Japan  
Reading: Rowe pp 69-151  
First Draft due

Nov. 26 (Wed) – Thanksgiving Break

Nov. 28 (Fri) – Thanksgiving Break

Dec. 3 (Wed): “Funerary Buddhism” in Contemporary Japan  
Reading: Rowe pp 152-230

Dec. 5 (Fri): Last Class Meeting – Semester Recap

Semester Paper Due: Dec 15 (Mon.), 12:30PM