

*Christopher Kaplonski*

## Anthropology of Religion

Early theorists of religion such as Malinowski, Durkheim and Weber, were interested in understanding religion as an integral part of culture and society. This course will continue and expand upon this tradition, paying particular attention to the interplay of the public and private aspects of religion. Through this course, students will not only gain a solid grounding in anthropological approaches to, and understandings of, religion, but also an appreciation for the ways in which religion is connected to other parts of the social world. Religion should not and can not be looked at in isolation. Religious (and other forms of ) belief are ultimately private and personal, yet many of its manifestations and enactments are public. Whether through shamanic trances or the celebration of saint's days, religion involves public performance. Religious practices and symbols often provide an idiom for the expression of other beliefs and claims to power and legitimacy. In other words, the public aspect of religion is often linked to more than personal religious sentiment. In looking at this aspect of religion, we will focus largely on one particular aspect of the public sphere, namely the political, and how public/private interaction is structured through it.

The course will be divided into three general sections. The first, and largest, deals with anthropological theories of religion. We will cover a variety of topics and approaches, encompassing traditional areas of interest to anthropologists as well as contemporary research interests. These include: approaches to the study of religion in anthropology from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present; spirit possession and shamanism; witchcraft; ancestor worship; revitalization movements and new religions; religion and cognition; a brief consideration of issues of rationality and belief; and the relationship of religion to science. The second part of the course will look at ritual as a focus of both the private and social aspects of religion. We will examine ritual and the role of symbols in belief systems. What is ritual? Why are they so common in belief systems? How do rituals and symbols bridge the private and public spheres? Finally, we will also explore the intersection of private and public in religion through an examination of the role of religion in politics, ranging from divine kingship, through dual structures of religion and the state such as pre-modern Tibet, and imperial court rituals.

We will draw upon case studies from various ethnographic regions as appropriate, although the main emphases will be on Asian and Western examples.

## Suggested readings:

The following list is not intended to be exhaustive, and is subject to revision. It is illustrative of the range of sources that this course will draw upon.

Adorno, Theodor

1994 *The stars down to earth and other essays on the irrational in culture.* Routledge: New York.

Barnes, Barry and David Bloor

1982 "Relativism, rationalism and the sociology of knowledge," in *Rationality and relativism.* Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, eds. pp. 21-47. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bell, Catherine

1995 *Ritual theory, ritual practice.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E.,

1965 *Theories of primitive religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

1976 *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Geertz, Clifford

1981 *Negara: the theater state in nineteenth century Bali.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gellner, David

1994 "Priests, healers, medium and witches: the context of possession in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal," *Man.* 29(1): 27-48.

Durkheim, Emile

1965 *The elementary forms of religious life.* New York: The Free Press.

Goldstein, Melvyn

1991 *A history of modern Tibet, 1913-1951: the demise of the Lamaist state.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hevia, James

1994 "Sovereignty and subject: constituting relations of power in Qing guest ritual," in *Body, subject and power in China.* Angela Zito and Tani Barlow, eds. pp. 181-200. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Humphrey, Caroline

1999 "Shamans in the city," *Anthropology today.* 15(3):3-10.

- Lewis, I.M.  
1989 *Ecstatic religion: a study of shamanism and spirit possession*. New York: Routledge
- Ortner, Sherry  
1973 "On key symbols," *American Anthropologist*. 75:1338-1346.  
1989 *High religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rawski, Evelyn  
1998 *The last emperors: a social history of Qing imperial institutions*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sangrian, Steven  
1987 *History and magical power in a Chinese community*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Tambiah, Stanley  
1990 *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, Nicholas and Caroline Humphrey, eds.  
1994 *Shamanism, history and the state*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Turner, Victor  
1970 *Forest of symbols: aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.
- Wallace, Anthony  
1956 "Revitalization movements," *American anthropologist*. 58:264-281.
- Weber, Max  
1958 *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Van Gennep, Arnold  
1960 *Rites of passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zhukovskaya, N.  
2000 "Neo-shamanism in the context of the contemporary ethno-cultural situation in the Republic of Buryatia," *Inner Asia*. 2(1):25-36.