



ANTH2340 / UGEC2960

# MAGIC, MYTH, AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Instructor:  
Dr. Venera R. Khalikova

Lecture: Wednesday 12:30–2:15 pm NAH 11  
Tutorial: Wednesday 2:30–3:15 pm NAH 11

Office hours: Monday 3:00pm–5:30 pm  
NAH 322  
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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is magic and why do people engage in it? How can we understand experiences that can be described as supernatural? How do such experiences affect people's lives around the world? How different is magical from scientific? What are myths, and are they true? And what is truth anyway? In this course, we will examine phenomena that are associated with the supernatural—and often viewed as irrational or superstitious—to see how they can be understood in cultural and social terms. We will not be able to solve whether magic, ghost, vampires, myths, divination, and the paranormal activities are real or not, but we will analyze them in the context of human relationships, love, healing, ritual, technology, and politics, debating the meanings of “reality,” “rationality,” and “belief.” For UGE students, this course serves as an introduction to anthropology.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon the completion of this course, you will be able to:

- define and explain key anthropological concepts related to the course, including the concepts of belief, ritual, cultural relativism, sympathetic magic, animism, paranormal
- give examples of how anthropologists study supernatural phenomena;
- explain the cultural aspects of reality and of the supernatural;
- explain how and why seemingly irrational beliefs make sense in their cultural contexts
- apply the knowledge to the analysis of magic in the world around you

## LEARNING MATERIAL

All the required readings will be posted on Blackboard.

The course does not have a textbook. But quite a few articles are selected from two books:

- **ARMW:** The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft (2017), edited by Rebecca L. Stein. Fourth edition. London and New York: Routledge.
- **SSCH:** The Supernatural in Society, Culture, and History (2018), edited by Dennis Waskul and Marc Eaton. First Edition. Temple University Press

# ASSESSMENT

## Mid-term exam (30%)

This is an in-class or online timed exam with 50 questions: multiple-choice, true-or-false, and fill-the-gap, based on the material from Week 1—Week 7. NO MAKE-UP EXAM

## Group Presentation (30%)

Students will form groups, conduct research on a chosen topic, and present their findings as a group on April 22 and April 29 (in class or on ZOOM). Detailed guidelines will be posted on Blackboard.

## Final Exam (40%)

This is a take-home exam that consists of 5 short essay answers, covering the entire semester's material. You will be given 10 question options and will choose 5 that you would like to answer. Due: May 13, on Blackboard with an attached VeriGuide report.

**Bonus:** Your final grade will be marked up (from B to B+, from B+ to A- etc.) if you contribute to class and tutorial discussions, demonstrating the knowledge of assigned texts and lectures.

# GRADE DESCRIPTORS

Grade	Course Achievements
A	<i>Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes:</i> your written work and class participation demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the introduced concepts, factually accurate information, and convincing argumentation. All work is original, of required length and format, and submitted on time.
A -	<i>Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes:</i> most of your written work and class participation demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the introduced concepts, factually accurate information, and convincing argumentation, even if occasionally contain minor errors. All work is original, of required length and format and submitted on time.
B+	<i>Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others:</i> your work and class participation show an overall good understanding of class material but may vary in clarity, contain a lot of minor factual errors, or slightly deviate from required length and format. All work is original and submitted on time.
B	
B -	
C +	<i>Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses:</i> your work and class participation show an overall acceptable level of understanding of class material but it somewhat lacks clarity, contains major factual errors, and/or often deviate from required length and format. You written assignments are original but occasionally submitted late.
C	
C -	
D +	<i>Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes:</i> your work and class participation show a low level of engagement and persistent distraction by the use of mobile phones or other technology. Your written assignments are original, but they show minimal understanding of class material, lack of clarity, major factual errors, considerably deviate from required length and format, and/or are submitted late.
D	
F	<i>Unsatisfactory performance on most learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.</i> Most of your assignments are submitted late or not submitted at all, they are extremely short, factually incorrect, and/or contain instances of plagiarism.

# WEEKLY SCHEDULE

\*Subject to change. Stay tuned on Blackboard

## Week 1—Jan 8: Introduction to the Course

- ARMW Chapter 1. The anthropological study of religion, pp. 1–31

## Week 2—Jan 15: The Nature of Magic and the Supernatural

- ARMW Chapter 7. Magic and divination, pp. 145–171
- Benedict Carey. “Do You Believe in Magic?” *New York Times*, January 23, 2007 <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/23/health/psychology/23magic.html>

## Week 3—Jan 22: Ghosts and Afterlife

- ARMW Chapter 8. Souls, Ghosts, and Death, pp. 172–204
- Joseph Bosco (2007) “Young People’s Ghost Stories in Hong Kong.” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 40, No. 5, pp. 785–807

## Jan 29: Lunar New Year

### (No Class, optional readings)

- Joseph Bosco (2011) “The Hong Kong Ocean Park Kidnapping Rumor.” *Ethnology*, 50(2):135-151
- Grant Evans (1997) “Ghosts and the New Governor: The Anthropology of a Hong Kong Rumor.” In Grant Evans and Maria Tam Siu-mi, eds. *Hong Kong: The Anthropology of a Chinese Metropolis*, pp. 267-296.

## Week 4—Feb 19: Myths

- ARMW Chapter 2. Mythology, pp. 32–57
- Jack Goody (2012) “Oral ‘literature.’” In *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 41–57

## Week 5—Feb 26: Shamans, Oracles, and Healers

- ARMW Chapter 6. Religious specialists, pp. 127–144
- Levi-Strauss “The Sorcerer and His Magic.” In *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology*. Second Edition, by Peter Brown and Ron Barrett, pp. 124–132
- BBC: Bhoot Vidya: India university to teach doctors Ghost Studies <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50915414>

## Week 6—Mar 4: Divination and Witchcraft

- ARMW Chapter 10. Witchcraft, pp. 233–251
- Tanya Luhrmann (1989) “The Goat and the Gazelle: Witchcraft.” In *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft*. Harvard University Press, pp. 42–54

## Week 7—Mar 11: Gods and Spirit Possession

- ARMW Chapter 9. Gods and Spirits, pp. 205–232
- A reading suggested by a guest lecturer

## **Week 8—March 18: Online Mid-Term Exam**

### **Week 9—Mar 25: UFOs and Paranormal**

- SSCH Chapter 4: Marc Eaton (2018) “Paranormal Investigation: The Scientist and the Sensitive,” pp. 76–94
- SSCH Chapter 11: Scott Scribner (2018) “Alien Abduction Narratives: A Proposed Model and a Brief Case Study”

### **Apr 1: Reading week (No Class)**

- Peter Huston (1992) “Night Terrors, Sleep Paralysis, and Devil Stricken Telephone Cords from Hell.” *Skeptical Inquirer* 17(1):64-68 (available online).
- Tanya Luhrmann (2015) “When Things Happen that You Can’t Explain,” *New York Times*, March 5. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/05/opinion/when-things-happen-that-you-cant-explain.html>

### **Week 10—April 8: Modernity and New Subjectivities**

- ARMW Chapter 11. The search for new meaning, pp. 252–278
- SSCH Chapter 9: Joseph Leacock (2018) *Vampirism: Modern Vampires and Embattled Identity Claims*, pp. 171 – 189

### **Week 11—April 15: Economy and Politics of the Supernatural**

- SSCH Chapter 6: Stephen Muzzatti and Emma Smith (2018) “The Spirits Tell Me that You’re Seeking Help”: Fortune-Telling in Late Capitalism.
- Jane M. Ferguson (2014) “Terminally Haunted: Aviation Ghosts, Hybrid Buddhist Practices, and Disaster Aversion Strategies Amongst Airport Workers in Myanmar and Thailand.” *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 47–64

### **Week 12—Apr 22: Group Presentations**

### **Week 13—Apr 29: Group Presentations and Conclusion**

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**May 13: Final Take-home exam due**

# **POLICIES AND SUPPORT**

## **Contacting me**

Use your CUHK email (not your personal email), when communicating about class matters. For most situations, you should write to one of the Teaching Assistants first—the class TAs are very knowledgeable and ready to help you. But feel free to email me as well, if there is something that the TAs do not know, or if you want to contact me directly. In line with the convention of academic communication, you can address me as “Dr. Khalikova.” I will do my best to answer your email within 24 hours, with an understandable exception of Saturdays and Sundays.

## **Educational technology**

This class relies on the use of Blackboard. All class communications, announcements, assignment guidelines, and homework submissions will be done through it. Note that it uses the email address assigned to you by the University, so it is your responsibility to have an electronic mail forwarded to your main email address.

## **Special accommodation**

If you need special accommodations or classroom modifications, you need to notify both me and the University’s Wellness and Counselling Center no later than the third week of class (<https://www2.osa.cuhk.edu.hk/disability/en-GB>).

## **Technology and Cell Phones**

Although I recognize the value of technology in aiding the learning process, I also understand that it can be a major hindrance to learning, when used inappropriately. Therefore, the use of laptops and mobile phones is not permitted in class (unless it is necessary for class activities). Mobile phones must be kept in your bags, turned off, or on silent mode (NOT on vibrate) as to avoid distracting your peers. E-readers and tablets are allowed only during tutorials when we discuss assigned articles and you need the texts in front of you.

Remember, browsing Facebook or any other website during the class distracts not only you but also persons sitting next to you, and such conduct is disrespectful to me and your classmates. Therefore, disruptions caused by phone calls, texting, emailing, or the use of any other communication technologies during a class will result **in the reduction of your final grade**. If you are expecting an important call, you should talk to me before the class.

## **Academic Integrity**

The University has recently updated its policy on Academic Integrity and the penalties for plagiarism and cheating. Read it carefully: every student is expected to comply with the policy; otherwise, if you are suspected of violating these obligations you will be subject to the outlined sanctions. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask me or your TA about this! [http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng.htm\\_files\\_%282013-14%29/p06.htm](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng.htm_files_%282013-14%29/p06.htm)

## **Classroom Recording**

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, **you may not record** lectures, discussion and/or activities during the class or tutorials without my permission obtained in advance, and only solely for your own private use.

## **Late Work and Absence**

Late or incomplete assignments will be marked down: one point (1%) will be subtracted **for each late day**. Class attendance is not required, but if you miss a class, it is your responsibility to copy class notes and go over the powerpoint presentations, otherwise, it will most likely result in poor understanding of class material and, ultimately, in a low grade. You are welcome to come to my office during office hours to go over the missed lectures!

## Discussion Rules

We will discuss many interesting, important and potentially controversial topics. I expect you to be **polite and respectful** of your classmates' opinions, limit your statements to academic (not emotional) arguments, and not use offensive language or judgmental statements.

## Grade Review

If you want to discuss and contest your grade, you can send me an email to set up an appointment during my office hours when we will go over your exam/written work and decide on a grade together. During this process, I can both mark your original grade up, if you demonstrate evidence that you know the material well, or mark it down.

## Independent Learning Center

If you need help with communication and learning skills, the University has a great resource for you. You can schedule a consultation or attend workshops on various strategies for improving learning outcomes <https://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/EN/mission.aspx>

## FURTHER READINGS

- Bronislaw Malinowski (1992 [1925]) "Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays. Waveland Print Inc.
- Bronislaw Malinowski "Coral Gardens and Their Magic"
- E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1963) "Consulting the Poison Oracle among the Azande," in Moro, Pamela, and Myers eds., *Magic, Witchcraft and Religion 8th edition*, pp. 308-313.
- Howells, William 1985 "The Shaman: A Siberian Spiritualist." In Lehmann and Myers eds., *Magic Witchcraft and Religion 5th edition*, pp. 102-109.
- Harner, Michael. 1980. "The Shamanic Journey: Introduction" in *The Way of the Shaman*, pp. 20-39.
- Charlanne Burke. "Witchcraft Tswana Style." In James Spradley and David McCurdy *Conformity and Conflict 11th Edition*, pp. 358-370.
- Luhrmann, Tanya et al. 2015. "Differences in Voice-Hearing experiences of people with psychosis in the USA, India, and Ghana: Interview-based study. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 206 (1): 41-44.
- Lewis, I. M. "The Anthropologist's Encounter with the Supernatural." In Lehmann and Myers, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion 3rd edition*, pp. 18-23.
- Luhrmann, Tanya. 2012. "Is That You, God?" in *When God Talks Back*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. pp. 39-71.
- Hyman, Ray "Cold Reading: How to Convince Strangers That You Know All About Them." In Kendrick Frazier, ed. *Paranormal Borderlands of Science*, pp. 79-96
- ARMW Chapter 5. *Altered State of Consciousness*, pp. 110-126
- John Whitmore (1995) "Religious Dimensions of the UFO Abductee Experience." In Moro, Myers and Lehmann eds. *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion, 7th edition*, pp. 418-27.
- SSCH Chapter 1: William Ryan Force. "Toward a Cryptoscience"