

Portland State University

PDXScholar

---

Young Historians Conference

Young Historians Conference 2023

---

Apr 26th, 9:00 AM

# Rite to Death, Left to Life: Death Ritual as a Cross-Cultural Unit of Analysis

Ro M. Runkel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

Runkel, Ro M., "Rite to Death, Left to Life: Death Ritual as a Cross-Cultural Unit of Analysis" (2023). *Young Historians Conference*. 1.

<https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians/2023/papers/1>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Young Historians Conference by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: [pdxscholar@pdx.edu](mailto:pdxscholar@pdx.edu).

Rite to death, left to life:  
Death ritual as a cross-cultural unit of analysis

Ro Runkel  
Grant High School  
PSU History 105  
Don Gavitte  
18 January 2023

**Abstract:** Death ritual is a nearly ubiquitous aspect of life within civilization, and serves the purpose of reconciling the logical positivist societal constructions that uphold social order with the fundamentally logic-breaking nature of death. This paper posits that death ritual serves as a strong cross-cultural unit of analysis as it provides insight into the defining socio-cultural traits and spiritual outlooks of different cultures. This unit of analysis is applied to Song-era Ch'an Buddhism, pre-colonial Hindu India, and Maori death ritual. For each of these examples, death rites are connected to aspects of art, culture, social organization, and spirituality or religion, and they are examined in relation to one another. The paper concludes with a further analysis of the consistent role death ritual plays in maintaining positivist social systems while being adapted to the disparate cultural needs of a given society.

## **Introduction**

The essential cultural features of any given group lie in their problems and how they go about solving them. A point at which we can observe important overlaps and divergences is the problem of death, which, despite the long-term mounted efforts of humans since we gained metacognition, remains pervasive. Death is ubiquitous, famously one of the two assured things in life. Its threat is somehow both gargantuan and intangible yet demonstrably imminent for all of us. Cross-cultural dealings with death tend in similar directions, but contain fundamental differences that point directly to the qualities of the society in which they are engendered. How we deal with death is an obverse mirror image of how we deal with life.

Spirituality, religion, and death are so deeply interconnected that it's hard to imagine the former two without the latter. These three phenomena are joined by a concept that surfaces nearly everywhere in human societies, be they primitive, civilized, eastern, western, in the global south or north: the soul. In nearly all death ritual cross-culturally, death is seen primarily as the departure of the soul from the body. Much of pre-death ritual is structured to ease this departure and enable it to take place with as little difficulty or pain as possible, for both the dying and their loved ones. Post-death ritual typically undertakes the task of reconciling the absence of a person's soul, their personality and life-force, with the physical evidence of their lives— their bodies, but also their possessions, dwellings, and the social responsibilities they fulfilled in life. The death rites performed by different cultures clue us in to their internal cultural traits. The

religious and spiritual themes within a culture are the most obvious when considering the standard rituals preceding and surrounding death, but, upon deeper probing, much of a culture's values can be identified or at least reflected in the way in which they manifest in death practices.

Death presents a particular threat to the typical cultural makeup of different groups due to its fundamental negative and anti-logical nature. Its presence negates sense and the wrench it throws in the logical processes of various cultural groups is very telling of those logical processes themselves and also the relative acceptance or rejection of the senseless within a culture's shared consciousness. (See: cultures wherein human knowledge is valued as lesser than that of nature or another larger force tend to handle death very differently than cultures wherein logic is heralded and anything that doesn't fit within that logic is threatening.) See the feature film *Igby Goes Down*: a young man, having become severely disillusioned with the rigidity and frigidity of his wealthy East Coast upbringing, runs away, only to return after learning that his much-hated mother is dying of cancer. He returns in time to witness her committing suicide via poison so as not to have to live through the indignity of long-term illness. When the death scene begins, he is cold and distant, as are his mother and brother. When he realizes his mother has actually died, though, he breaks down in anger. The rage induced by the suddenness, the motivation, and his role in his mother's death breaks through any remaining vestiges of that cold world and its logic against which he was rebelling. Distraught, he pummels her corpse, his older brother looking on, bereft yet blank.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond death's ubiquity, some themes consistently repeat themselves in death rites through time and space. Despite superficial differences, nearly all prominent religions and spiritualities share the belief that in death a person's soul leaves their body and takes on a life independent of the physical form it once inhabited. Conceptions of the nature of this life vary cross-culturally, but the most prominent usually fall under the umbrellas of a) reincarnation, b) damnation, or c) utopian eternal peace. (Reincarnation itself can be a form of damnation, e.g. Ch'an Buddhist belief.)<sup>2</sup> As said by the Existentialist thinker Jean-Paul Sartre, "Hell is— other people."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Igby Goes Down*, directed by Burr Steers (United Artists, 2002)

<sup>2</sup> Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. "Zen Buddhism." *Monumenta Nipponica* 1, no. 1 (1938): 48–57.

<sup>3</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul. *No Exit, and Three Other Plays*. Vintage International edition. New York: Vintage International (1989) 47.

That isn't to mention the non-spiritual or -religious aspects of a culture that influence its practices surrounding death. To iterate: the death rite is a microcosm, a reflection of societal rite. In death everything ceases, ergo everything must be finally resolved. To examine death rites cross-culturally is to discover what different cultures consider to be needing resolution, to follow their logic to its breaking point, and to understand the context and implications of their features in practical application. Examined in this paper are the death rites of three distinct cultures through this lens. The analysis presented, while not exhaustive, attempts to understand the context, substance, and implications of death ritual within these cultures as they relate to religion or spirituality, immediate physical context, cultural themes, and other notable traits that are reflected within rite.

### **Medieval period: Song-era Ch'an Buddhism**

Of the prominent religions of the period, Ch'an Buddhism took the center stage in the Chinese medieval era both as a preeminent religion and in terms of evolving a symbolically resonant death ritual. Ch'an Buddhism was a Buddhist sect that preceded Zen and had distinctive non-traditional interpretations of orthodox Buddhist belief and practice. In Ch'an, prominent masters of the monastic "Ch'an lineage" were considered to be on-par with Buddha himself.<sup>4</sup> Masters were believed to transmit the message of the Dharma on a different level, one that surpassed the typical written contributions to the body of pre-existent Buddhist spiritual writings, and they considered the highest and most meaningful method of transmitting the message of the Dharma to be that spoken through the mouth of the Buddha: in accordance with this, they named particularly prominent monastic Buddhists Buddhas, who were then tasked with verbal transmission of the Dharma.<sup>5</sup> This was a very unorthodox practice, and in nearly all other sects of Buddhism, the canonization of living monks was completely unheard of. During the Song

---

<sup>4</sup> Buckelew, Kevin. "Ritual Authority and the Problem of Likeness in Chan Buddhism." *History of Religions* 62, no. 1 (2022): 1–48.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* 3–6.

dynasty (960-1276), however, it was a widely practiced religion, and it exerted a substantial cultural influence.

Death rituals in Buddhism are difficult to study, especially those from days of yore. Nearly all of the information we have pertaining to Buddhist death rites derives from Buddhist scriptural texts, which, though vital, take a definitionally prescriptive as opposed to descriptive approach in depicting the actual rituals practiced by Buddhist sects and communities in different eras and areas throughout history.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, it's hard to cross-reference the practices of the Song-era Ch'an with those of other Buddhist sects at different points. But one can still examine these practices in relation to the theology that accompanies them and contextualize them within the historical moment at which they emerged and proliferated.

The appointing of living monks to Buddha-dom led to a shift in worship that truly set Ch'an apart from its contemporary sects of Buddhism. This worked in concert with the "different level" of transmission of the Dharma through verbal, oratory forums to create truly distinct traditions. An example of one of these traditions is described by Buckelew, quoted below:

An important context in which to seek out answers to these questions is the Ch'an ritual of "ascending the hall" (*shangtang* 上堂)(...) During the ceremony, abbots of public Chan monasteries ascended a raised platform at the front of the Dharma hall before the entire monastic assembly (and, depending on the occasion, sometimes government officials and lay patrons) in order to deliver a sermon and answer questions from members of the audience.<sup>7</sup>

The ascendance of specific Ch'an masters to this role of spiritual and interpretive authority over the Dharma influenced their death ritual profoundly. During the Song dynasty, a ritual emerged in the postmortem care for the bodies of appointed members of the Ch'an lineage that was both completely new in the Buddhist tradition and took heavy inspiration from death rituals of other cultures, near and far. This was the genesis of Ch'an ritual mummification, one of the most notable aspects of the Ch'an's divergence from orthodox Buddhism and eastern death

---

<sup>6</sup> Sharf, R. H. "The Idolization of Enlightenment: On the Mummification of Cha'an Masters in Medieval China." *History of Religions* 33, no. 1 (1992): 1-31.

<sup>7</sup> Buckelew, Kevin. "Ritual Authority and the Problem of Likeness in Chan Buddhism." *History of Religions* 62, no. 1 (2022): 1-48.

practice at large— though these divergences were products of Ch’an’s unique convergences with other aspects of Chinese culture.

The Song dynasty was a prominent period for both Ch’an Buddhism and the nascent Neo-Confucian school, whose goal was to revive the orthodox practices and teachings of Confucianism in Chinese culture while rejecting the influence that Buddhism had had on contemporary iterations of Confucian thought.<sup>8</sup> Despite its stated rejection of Buddhist influence, neo-Confucianism borrowed much from Ch’an Buddhism, and vice versa: Ch’an Buddhist practices bearing a clear Confucian influence are numerous and telling.

The Ch’an lineage must be understood in the context of wider Chinese culture, both at the time and in the years before the Song dynasty. Chinese culture was, overall, highly patriarchal. Confucianism and Legalism mutually contributed to an ossified and ubiquitous structure of social hierarchy that defined all aspects of Chinese life, going beyond just the political or familial structure to encompass all aspects of the social strata. Taosim, China’s OG spiritual practice, influenced Ch’an Buddhism greatly in its emphasis on knowledge and emptiness as integral to spiritual awareness and eventual enlightenment. Ch’an interacts with these conditions relatively predictably: it’s nominally unassociated with Legalism (the backbone to the proverbial body of Chinese belief), though it takes influence from Legalism’s emphasis on external regulatory rigidity in terms of its internal hierarchical organization and administration; it abides by Confucianism’s main five values for the most part, especially those relating to social organization<sup>9</sup>, and it derives much of its actual spiritual outlook from the Tao, retrofitting teachings in the *Tao Te Ching* to fit within the Buddhist dharma structure.<sup>10</sup>

Buddhist teachings stipulate that after the departure of the soul from the body in death, the body becomes nothing more than a foul-smelling hunk of evidence of what once was— this follows with the overwhelming emphasis in Buddhism on the internal and metacognitive nature

---

<sup>8</sup> Arghirescu, Diana. “Confluences Between Neo-Confucian and Chan Practical Methods of Self-Cultivation; The Anthology Reflections on Things at Hand and the Platform Sutra in Comparative Perspective.” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (2019): 265–80.

<sup>9</sup> Ascending the hall, for example, somewhat mirrors the Confucian idea of Junzi (君子), the interpretation of superior beings and their entitlement to authority through meritocracy. The idea of a divinely pious patrilineage too bears obvious influence from the Confucian value Xiao (孝), especially within the familial structure of Ch’an Buddhist monasteries.

<sup>10</sup> Allen, Barry. “The Virtual and the Vacant-Emptiness and Knowledge in Chan and Daoism.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37, no. 3 (2010): 457–71.

of life, with little emphasis on the physical form.<sup>11</sup> But in Ch'an, and to varying degrees in other sects, it is conversely thought that Buddhist monastics who were truly touched by and embodied the Dharma had bodies with supernatural properties even after death, when their enlightened souls were thought to have departed from their physical form and been annihilated in their achievement of Nirvana. The Ch'an's practice of worshiping specific living people, and that worship taking on a somewhat physical nature (through the oratory process described above—the gathering around, the elevation of the subject), flows naturally into the mummification of appointed monks of the Ch'an lineage and the subsequent role their preserved remains played in Ch'an worship overall.

The specifics of the mummification process they used and its historical and cultural origins are outlined in Sharf. He examines both the actual process of ritual mummification and the subsequent role mummified masters played in Song-era Ch'an worship. In the text *Ch'ih-hsiu pai-chang ch'ing-kuei* is listed the nine steps of the mummification process:

- (1) encoffining the body, (2) transferring the coffin to the Dharma Hall, (3) sealing the coffin, (4) hanging a portrait of the dead in the Dharma Hall, (5) making formal expressions of grief, (6) offering libations of tea and hot water, (7) holding a small consultation in front of the departed spirit, (8) offering libations of tea and hot water, and (9) transporting the coffin to the cremation (or burial) ground.<sup>12</sup>

For members of the Ch'an lineage and recipients of special rites, the process went beyond the ninth step in their bodies becoming worshipable objects in death. Abbots were often gilded before their entombment, with parts of their body being sculpted to further evoke the image of the Buddha, such as extending of the earlobes. Abbots were entombed inside of the Dharma hall permanently for ease of worship by monks in their monastery. Their portraits, reflections of their souls and extant independently of their bodies (though their bodies received no deficit of attention), remained on display permanently and were the primary subjects of worship in the years following the abbots' final sequestering.

---

<sup>11</sup> "Visuddhimagga." The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism. Princeton University Press, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Sharf, R. H. "The Idolization of Enlightenment : On the Mummification of Cha'an Masters in Medieval China." History of Religions 33, no. 1 (1992): 1–31.



## Pre-colonial Hindu India

Despite monumental changes over the millenia during which Hinduism has been the most practiced religion in India, Hindu death rituals have remained relatively constant, and maintain throughout their history direct ties to the social and cultural realities that constitute the substance of Indian life. Hindu death rites contain beliefs and practices found also in the death rites of other cultures, which point to themes that often pop up in non-interactive cultures seemingly on their own.

Hindu death rites, like the religion from which they are derived, are multiplicitous and idiosyncratic, rife with highly specific and symbolically resonant pre- and postmortem rituals enacted with the common intention to ease the transition from life to death and then to rebirth. These rituals are outlined in the Vedas, the oldest of the canonical Hindu texts and the basis for all later developments in Hindu theology. Families typically have specific portions of the Veda they follow intergenerationally. Chanting of and rumination on these Vedic mantras are integral in the death process. It is believed that, upon death and subsequent spiritual departure, the soul finds itself wherever the person's final thoughts took place, so heavy emphasis is placed on thinking the right thoughts in accordance with the family Veda.<sup>13</sup>

Death practices in continental India bear a dual influence: much of common ritual is derived from orthodox Hindu teachings, yet much is influenced directly by the Caste system. This is true in some meta sense as well in the mutual influence of the Caste system and Hinduism themselves. This is evidenced in the specific practices expected of specific families, both according to their caste and their spiritual orientation— many families have a designated God to which they pray, whose name a dying person is encouraged to utter with their final breaths.<sup>14</sup> Different castes at large too had specific death rituals associated with their social positions. Unsurprisingly the traditional death rites and burial practices of more esteemed Kshatriya and Brahmin are leveraged above those of lower castes. In a report of a Nadar communities' death practices, disparity in the respect paid to grieving families is shown as a primary expression of the influence of caste on death ritual; while people of the lower laboring classes mourn along

---

<sup>13</sup> Prakash, L.T. Om, and John Joseph Kennedy. "Death Rituals and Change Among Hindu Nadars in a South Indian Village." *South Asia Research* 41, no. 2 (2021): 171–86.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* 176

with wealthy landowners when they enter grieving periods, those of higher castes pay no mind to the surviving families of the poorer dead.<sup>15</sup>

Disparities in caste, class, and lineage are all more or less reconciled when it comes time for the handling of remains. Cremation was and continues to be by far the preeminent mortuary technique in India and the Hindu diaspora and spans all societal divides. Many factors contributed to its becoming ubiquitous, though the two most worthy of examination are the theological and practical conditions under which it emerged. Initially, cremation was a pragmatic response to the difficulty of burial in India's climate. Large swaths of India are located in tropical regions where flooding and other environmental factors would prove counter-indicative of ground burial. This is equally and oppositely true for some desert regions within the country. The process of cremation also carried symbolic significance in Hindu spiritual practice. The incineration of the body evoked the complete liberation of the soul from the body, and the liberation of the body from its continued existence *sans animus*. Cremation typically takes place in a public ceremony, with the remains on display to onlookers as they burn. The visual confrontation of the remains physically disintegrating provides a sense of closure, making the permanent departure of a person from the living world tangible and final.<sup>16</sup>

## **Maori death ritual**

Maori culture proves particularly important to consider when analyzing death rites cross-culturally. The Maori embody death rituals that are deeply spiritually connected to the physical environment in which they come about and communicate the implications of a spirituality deeply tied to nature at large. Though the term "Maori" refers to many different groups and subgroups of aboriginal peoples in Oceania, Maori death rituals as examined here commonly derive from shared myth and belief that more or less span the Maori people, with some specific practices varying from group to group.

---

<sup>15</sup> Samarth, Aditi G. "The Survival of Hindu Cremation Myths and Rituals in 21st Century Practice: Three Contemporary Case Studies." Order No. 10970363, The University of Texas at Dallas, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Tully, Mark. "WHEN BODY AND SOUL GO THEIR SEPARATE WAYS." *India Worldwide*, Oct 31, 1994, 4,

Maori death rites, like those of many other cultures, reflect within themselves what is valued in Maori culture. Maori spirituality and religion are more slippery to analyze than those presented in the two above sections, as canonical Maori scripture is passed on primarily through a millennia-long oral tradition. As such, the specifics of Maori spiritual thought that might inform their death practices are mostly absent from written records. Some have been recorded, however, and these will help inform an analysis of the cultural context for Maori death practice.

Superficially, Maori spirituality diverges greatly from dominant eastern and western religious institutions. Its mythology and ethical instruction are much closer to Indigenous American spiritual practice than to any of the axial age descendents that enroll most of the Earth's population in their parish. Traditional Maori death rituals were fairly typical in their initial stages; shortly after death, remains would be buried in shallow graves within sequestered caves. But the bulk of real ritual in Maori death practices could be found during and after the exhumation of the dead. The process of exhumation was meticulous, and is detailed below:

In the case of a burial the next act is for the adept of the people to whom the dead belonged to advance and open the grave. He bears with him a kind of wooden spade termed a *per* that was used for this purpose... He now proceeds to open the grave, throwing the earth over his right shoulder as he does so. Meanwhile one of the *tohunga* or priestly experts of the folk owning the land is continuously reciting certain ritual, the exhumer remaining silent.<sup>17</sup>

Once exhumed, remains would be taken back to the dwelling of the dead's family and posed for viewing. Viewing preparation was similarly meticulous and evocative of rituals now considered standard in much of the west— dressing of the remains in their best clothes, adorning them with jewelry, endowing them with symbolic and literal weaponry. Many Maori groups used meticulously carved wooden burial chests in this later stage of the burial process, which often bore inscriptions and imagery that corresponded with the deceased's life and social role. One undated chest found near the Bay of Islands depicts a woman in childbirth, and is speculated to contain the partial remains of a woman who died under those circumstances.<sup>18</sup> The carvings on these chests were very similar to those found in depictions on cave walls in the same regions. These chests contained whole or partial skeletons along with the symbolic objects that were

---

<sup>17</sup> Best, Elsdon. "NOTES ON CUSTOMS, RITUAL AND BELIEFS PERTAINING TO SICKNESS, DEATH, BURIAL AND EXHUMATION AMONG THE MAORI OF NEW ZEALAND." *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 35, no. 1(137) (1926): 6–30.

<sup>18</sup> Cheeseman, T. F. "49. Maori Burial-Chests." *Man* 18 (1918): 81.

buried with them. A viewing would be held wherein all family and community members were to see and mourn over the remains.<sup>19</sup> After viewing ceremonies were finished, remains were cast into ravines or caves.<sup>20</sup>

In- and exhumation phases dually reflect aspects of Maori spirituality, specifically in its connection to nature. As Maori myth tells, death was under the jurisdiction of the deistic Earth Mother, who took the responsibility of stewardship of human death while in argument with the Sky Parent deity.<sup>21</sup> This connection within Maori myth of death to Earth is directly represented in the inhumation stage of burial, wherein much of the body of the dead is physically reunited with Earth. The exhumation and later disposal of remains gets muddier in this connection, but ties can still be seen, especially when considering the disposal of remains with precious objects in tow—Earth Mother is the steward of death, but also the steward of life. The inclusion of one's prized possessions in burial is indicative of a presumed life-after-death, and more specifically one that is lived within or after being taken back in completely by nature. Carvings on burial chests of symbology directly or indirectly reflecting aspects both of the individual's life and of the mythology and art of the culture preserve in the final inhumation the same sense of character, reason, beauty, and narrative which, too, are rendered in the death practices of many other cultures, and which preserve a person's cultural membership and humanity beyond their capacity to embody it themselves. In the Maori case, depictions on burial chests act as something of a death mask, though instead of depicting the dead themselves, they depict the dead in the form of style and symbology also used to signify Maori mythological creatures. This perhaps points to a wider belief of what becomes of the soul after liberation from the body—joining the immaterial realm of myth, creation, and the extra-human forces that silently influence the world of the living.

## Conclusion

---

<sup>19</sup> These viewings often lasted a very long time due to the grandiose nature of Maori mourning practices. This aspect of the death ritual is worth going into but proves too extensive to be adequately examined in this paper.

<sup>20</sup> Best, *Notes on Customs*: 17

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

No matter the outlook of the culture involved, the logical positivism toward which humans tend struggles to cohabitate with the inherent enormity and senselessness of death. Even the famously death-friendly Buddhists cannot confront the mortality of their heralded spiritual gurus. The reconciliation we must enact in order for death not to tear down the logical and theological load-bearing walls that hold up life within society are ever-present, and despite their variations in method and justification, all more or less attempt to reach the same goal. The cultures and associated death rites examined in this paper differ from one another substantially: none share the same language, history, conception of God, social structure, et cetera. Each traditional ritual corresponds to its parent culture, and the influences that parent culture took on from its own predecessors and contemporaries, but all function similarly in constructing a cultural container in which death can exist without its negation spreading beyond its ritual boundaries and out into the carefully maintained positivist world of cultural life.

Unchecked, death makes everyone an existentialist (if not an outright nihilist). Social functioning becomes more or less impossible without subscription to the idea that death, though tragic, ultimately has a point and obeys some set of understandable rules. This is where conceptions of the soul and afterlife become relevant once again: acceptance of the actual finality and annihilation of death, while maybe conceivable on an individual basis, cannot be recognized fully within society. And so we find a way for death to not really be death, but an extension of the same cultural, spiritual, and social life we have been living since birth, so that people retain their drive to live and to act and to participate positively in society with the understanding that, in the end, it will pay off and mean something. This means transcendence: ascension to the world of the gods, of myth and origin, as seen in Maori rite, or unadulterated and destinationless liberation as seen in Hinduism. And these are reflective of what is valued in life— the Maori deeply socially value shamans and storytellers, and those figures hold a respected social position within the cultural hierarchy. In Ch’an we see permanent ascension to the role of the powerful spiritual but also familial patriarch within the structure of the monastery. This is germane to the Confucian nature of Song China’s socio-cultural makeup and the pervasive belief in the father as the ultimate authority, literally and spiritually. The intricate and ossified caste system of pre-colonial India is differently mirrored; where in life there is strict boundary and differentiation, there is in

death a great reconvergence. Its logic is preserved, and there is still life after death, but it is one of freedom from the bounds of a structured social life. Life's construct is reflected in death as a distinct de-construct.

It's the function of death ritual as a load-bearing wall in the preservation of positivist logic and social relations in the face of annihilation that makes it an especially likely cross-cultural unit of analysis: to follow with the wall analogy, one can extrapolate from death ritual easily to the load which it bears and adjacent parts of the social structure that define life within a given society. The nature of the ritual that must be built around death in order for it to fit as seamlessly as possible into the life of a given society paints a negative-space portrait of that culture in perfect contour. Through analysis of death rituals we gather how a people goes about dealing with one of the ultimate problems of human life. The Venn diagram of cultural traits it reveals is conducive of a truly comparative model for world historical study— a way of analyzing cultures along the same fault lines. A model like this is integral to the development of a framework that is actually historical and can tell us about human civilization's internal variations in a way that works and matters.

## Bibliography

- Allen, Barry. "The Virtual and the Vacant-Emptiness and Knowledge in Chan and Daoism." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37, no. 3 (2010): 457–71. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6253.2010.01596.x.
- Arghirescu, Diana. "Confluences Between Neo-Confucian and Chan Practical Methods of Self-Cultivation; The Anthology Reflections on Things at Hand and the Platform Sutra in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (2019): 265–80. doi:10.1080/17570638.2019.1679977.
- Best, Elsdon. "NOTES ON CUSTOMS, RITUAL AND BELIEFS PERTAINING TO SICKNESS, DEATH, BURIAL AND EXHUMATION AMONG THE MAORI OF NEW ZEALAND." *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 35, no. 1(137) (1926): 6–30.
- Buckelew, Kevin. "Ritual Authority and the Problem of Likeness in Chan Buddhism." *History of Religions* 62, no. 1 (2022): 1–48. doi:10.1086/720627.
- Cheeseman, T. F. "49. Maori Burial-Chests." *Man* 18 (1918): 81–81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2788608>.
- Prakash, L.T. Om, and John Joseph Kennedy. "Death Rituals and Change Among Hindu Nadars in a South Indian Village." *South Asia Research* 41, no. 2 (2021): 171–86. doi:10.1177/02627280211000167.
- "Rites of Transition: Hindu Death Rituals Reflect Deep Reverence for the "Great Departure". " 1999.*Hinduism Today*, Sep 30, 18. <http://stats.lib.pdx.edu/proxy.php?url=http://search.proquest.com/magazines/rites-transition-hindu-death-rituals-reflect-deep/docview/232447728/se-2>.
- Samarth, Aditi G. "The Survival of Hindu Cremation Myths and Rituals in 210RW1S34RfeSDcfkexd09rT3 St1RW1S34RfeSDcfkexd09rT3 Century Practice: Three Contemporary Case Studies." Order No. 10970363, The University of Texas at Dallas, 2018. <http://stats.lib.pdx.edu/proxy.php?url=http://search.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/survival-hindu-cremation-myths-rituals-21-sup-st/docview/2086578105/se-2>.
- Sharf, R. H. "The Idolization of Enlightenment : On the Mummification of Cha'an Masters in Medieval China." *History of Religions* 33, no. 1 (1992): 1–31.
- Steers, Burr, director. *Igby Goes Down* (United Artists, 2002) Blu-ray Disc, 1080p HD.
- Suzuki. "Zen Buddhism." *Monumenta Nipponica*. 1, no. 1 (1938): 48–57. doi:info:doi/.

Tsai, J. N. (2006). Opening up the ritual casket: patterns of concealment and disclosure in early and medieval Chinese religion. *Material Religion*, 2(1), 38–66.  
<https://doi.org/10.2752/174322006778053951>

“Visuddhimagga.” *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton University Press, 2013.

Zaluchu, Sonny Eli. “Interpretation About Death Rite of the Nias Ethnic and Its Relation to Social Order.” *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 2023,  
302228221149804–302228221149804. doi:10.1177/00302228221149804.