

Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion, Hiroshi Obayashi, a native of Japan, came to the U.S. for graduate work. With a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, he joined the Religion faculty of Rutgers University in 1967. Over the last 40 years he has taught a range of courses, including: "Introduction to Religion: Social Patterns;" "Religions of the Eastern World;" "Religions of the Western World;" "Religion & Science;" "Zen and Eastern Culture;" "Religion and Politics;" "Seminar in Theology;" "Death and Afterlife" among many others. The last three have been taught most recently.

Authored books: "Ernst Troeltsch and Theology Today" (Tokyo: 1972); "Agape and History" (Washington, DC: 1981); "Theology and Historical Consciousness" (Tokyo: 1982); "Death & Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions" (New York: 1992); "Death and Eternal Life: Christian Ideas in Historical Perspective" (Tokyo: 1994) and numerous articles in scholarly journals in Japan, Scandinavia, Canada, as well as in the U.S. Served on the board of directors of the American Academy of Religion and as the president of its mid-Atlantic region.

The focus of his research throughout his professional career, which is reflected in many journal articles and books, is the historical understanding of human beings and all of her/his cultural manifestations particularly "religion." Human beings are born into certain historical conditions and are shaped by the values of his/her culture, but also are the creators of new values and the molders of brand new shapes and cultures. "Religion" is the quintessential part of the values human beings create. So, the studying and understanding of religion in many of its manifestations as the changing forms of created values has been his concern. It is in this context that the more recent interests developed, that is, the historical and cross-cultural study of various concepts of death, approaches to death, and the ideas about the post-mortem life and world manifested in myriads of mythological expressions and amazing varieties of rituals. These ideas also show human beings' ability to create values as a group as well as individually in changing historical conditions that are overwhelmingly adverse to their well being through her/his tenacity in coping with and adapting to them. It is these ideas that are most prominently embodied as religions.