

# Review of: "Integrating Afterlife Beliefs of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism Through the Cyclic Universe Model: A Multidisciplinary Approach with Practical Implications for Mental Health and Caregiving Professions"

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The authors use accessible language to write about complex religious and cosmological belief systems. They set out to do what initially felt like a long shot: to resolve seemingly incompatible belief systems into a coherent cosmology that aligns with scientific understandings of the cyclic universe. As I started reading, I suspended my innate skepticism that this could be achieved. However, as I neared the end of the manuscript, I found that Brodziak and Jenrzejczyk had achieved what they set out to do: to resolve seemingly irreconcilable belief systems into a coherent understanding of the cyclic universe. As a layperson who grew up within Western Christian culture, with little understanding of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism, this achievement impressed me.

Because of the inclusion of "practical implications for mental health and caregiving professions" in the title, I kept waiting to discover practical implications for these specific professions. This was only lightly addressed near the end of the manuscript, and no hands-on scenarios or examples of where this integrative understanding can be applied were included.

I had the sense that the authors were directing their findings to end-of-life caregivers. Yet, I remained unsure how caregivers might enact their understanding of integrations of these four faith systems within their caregiving roles for people about to die, or who have a fear of dying. The fear of dying or the problematic nature of considering life after death for people near death should be discussed earlier, along with the needs of end-of-life caregivers for specific tools to manage these difficult conversations with patients. I recommend fleshing this out more fully from the beginning of the paper.

Shintoism seemed to be an afterthought; it is mentioned infrequently compared to Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. I wonder whether Shintoism might be subsumed within a broader category of animism and then given greater emphasis than Shintoism is currently given.

What I appreciated most about this article was how the authors show how all four faith systems, while containing apparently mutually exclusive qualities, such as linearity vs. circularity and finiteness vs. infinite cycles, are not incompatible within a scientifically understood cyclic universe. Rather, each faith occupies a different part of the cycle of expansion, peaking, contraction, destruction, dissolution, and resurgence. Well done! You offer a compelling,

sophisticated analysis of how three major faith systems align with a modern scientific understanding of the origin and ongoing nature of the changing universe over time.

Two recommendations are to consider placing the health care professional role and need near the beginning of the paper and to expand Shintoism within a broader understanding of animism and afford it more space in the paper if you want to retain it in the title.

Two lingering thoughts or questions are as follows:

While Islam is touched upon briefly on page 4, its absence from the paper is conspicuous. There is no need to include it more fully, but perhaps consider mentioning why you have chosen to omit this major world religion from the discussion.

Another lingering question is about where the belief in cyclicalality originally came from. Since we humans are composed of stardust, of particles within the expanding and contracting cyclic universe, might we retain an embodied memory of these cycles, which are much greater than our own short lives? How else could humans conceive of cycles exceeding any lived frame of reference, particularly before the age of the Hubble telescope or well more primitive telescopes in the Renaissance? Offering some conjecture here might encourage readers to identify how they personally relate to the notion of the cyclic universe and their place within it. We are, after all, cyclic organisms, with biological rhythms governing our pulses, women's menses, our life spans, birth, growth, reproduction, decline, death, and return to the ongoing mineral and hydrological cycles on earth.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this highly engaging, accessible, and thought-provoking article. I appreciate being invited to review your work. Thank you.