

# Religion in Japan

## Section 1

Instructor/Title	Elizabeth Kenney
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### 【Course Outline / Description】

←input course overview in Approx. 200-300 words.

This course is an introduction to the most important types of religious expression in Japan: ancestor worship, Shinto, Buddhism, and the New Religions. We focus on contemporary beliefs and practices, especially elements of religion that are encountered every day in Japan. Various approaches to the interpretation of religion will be discussed.

As an important part of the course, students will write a field report. This field report gives students an opportunity to observe a religious site or participate in a religious activity. In other words, they will encounter religion outside the classroom.

In addition, each student will interview a Japanese person about his/her religious beliefs. This interview provides real-world evidence of contemporary Japanese beliefs and practices.

## Section 2

After finishing this course, students will:

know Shinto deities;

be able to discuss objects and activities in Shinto shrines;

have an admirable knowledge of several Japanese new religions;

understand the difference between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism;

be able to explain to their friends and relatives why existence is deeply unsatisfying, according to basic Buddhist thought;

know something about views of the afterlife in some made-in-Japan Christian groups;

be able to engage in a nuanced discussion of rites for aborted fetuses in Japan.

## Section 3

Sept. 3 (M)                      Introductory meeting.

### Part 1. Ancestor Worship and Household Religion

Sept. 6 (Th)                      Ancestor worship.

### Part 2. Shinto

Sept. 10 (M)                      Shinto in the household. Purity and fertility.

Sept. 13 (Th)                      Shinto deities.  
pp. 22-39, *The Fox and the Jewel*, “A God of One’s Own.”

Sept. 16 (Sun)                      Field-trip to Fushimi Inari Shrine (tentative)

Sept. 17 (M)                      Shinto shrines. *Ema*, *o-mamori*, and *o-fuda*.  
pp. 1-17, “Buying Out Chance”; pp. 18-21, “What Constitutes Religious Activity?”

- Sept. 20 (Th) Shinto and the State.
- Sept. 24 (M) Yasukuni Shrine controversy.  
Reading: hand-out, John Breen, "Fine Words Indeed."  
*Group #1 interview write-ups due.*

### Part 3. The New Religions

- Sept. 27 (Th) Introduction to the New Religions.
- Oct. 1 (M) Discussion of the interviews #1.
- Oct. 4 (Th) Sōka Gakkai: introduction, short video.
- Oct. 8 (M) Sōka Gakkai: more.  
Reading: hand-out, Levi McLaughlin on SGI.
- Oct. 11 (Th) Tenrikyō.  
pp. 49-62, *Tenrikyo*, "The Message."
- Oct. 13 (Sat) Field-trip to Tenri (tentative). Afternoon.
- Oct. 15 (M) Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren.
- Oct. 18 (Th) AUM Shinrikyō.
- Oct. 22 (M) Documentary: "A-2" on AUM Shinrikyo.  
pp. 64-68, Murakami Haruki, *Underground*.
- Oct. 25 (Th) No class. Gaidai festival.
- Oct. 29 (M) No class. Gaidai festival.
- Nov. 1 (Th) Discussion of the readings.  
*Group #2 interview write-ups due.*
- Nov. 5 (M) Review for the mid-term.
- Nov. 8 (Th) Mid-term.
- Nov. 12 (M) Discussion of the interviews #2.

### Part 4. Buddhism and one day of Christianity

- Nov. 15 (Th) Suffering and the Four Noble Truths.  
pp. 86-100, "The human predicament and its resolution."
- Nov. 19 (M) Reincarnation.
- Nov. 22 (Th) Karma.  
*Optional*: pp. 84-94, Robert Thurman, "Searching for the Self," *Inner*

*Revolution.*

- Nov. 26 (M) Mahayana Buddhism. The *Lotus Sutra*. Upaya.  
pp. 112-115, excerpt from the *Lotus Sutra*.
- Nov. 29 (Th) Bodhisattvas.
- Dec. 3 (M) Pure Land Buddhism.  
pp. 99-100, “Shinran: Tannisho.”  
Field reports due.
- Dec. 6 (Th) Documentary. “Souls of Zen.”
- Dec. 10 (M) Abortion and *mizuko-kuyō*.  
pp. 119-128, *Liquid Life*, “Apology.”  
pp. 137-143. Jeff Wilson, excerpt from *Mourning the Unborn Dead*.
- Dec. 13 (Th) Japanese Christians and the Ancestors.  
pp. 129-136, “Japanese Christians and the World of the Dead.”
- Dec. 17 (M) Student presentations or review for the final.

**Section 3**

Readings will be provided.

**Section 4**

Final Exam	25%
Quizzes or Midterm Exam	50%
Writing Assignments	15%
Work Outside of Classroom Activities	10%

**Section 5**

Class discussion is a vital part of the course.  
This course is open to students at all levels.