

## Religion in Japan

### Section 1

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#### 【Course Outline / Description】

Japan is somewhat mysterious with respect to religion. On the one hand, nearly all Japanese deny being religious. On the other hand, most Japanese still participate in religious rituals, and religious places, festivals, and objects of worship can be seen at almost every turn. This introductory course seeks to contextualize and penetrate the religious landscape of Japan. Our hope is to both explore the general patterns in religiosity in this country and to understand the various trends in religious behavior.

### Section 2

#### 【Course Objectives/Goals/Learning Outcomes】

- to understand traditional and modern Japanese religious life
- to be able to articulate and defend an analytical position in a discussion setting
- to be able to explain a complex topic by employing non-print media, such as film

### Section 3

#### 【Class Schedule/Class Environment, Literature and Materials】

##### 1.) Introduction

READING: Read syllabus materials carefully and prepare questions you have about the course

##### 2.) Needs, Wants, and Beliefs I: Patterns in Religiosity

READING: by Prohl and Nelson pp. 3-15.6

##### 3.) Needs, Wants, and Beliefs II: The Ritual of the Everyday

READING: by Prohl and Nelson pp. 15.6-21

READING: “The Dō Spirit of Japan” by Davies and Ikeno pp. 71.5-82.5

##### 4.) Foundational Myths of Japan: Creation Stories

READING: “Shintō” by Reader pp. 64-76

##### 5.) The Nature of Kami and the Character of Shinto Shrines

READING: “Meaning of Kami” by Holtom pp.77-79 AND “Shintō Shrines” by Scheid pp. 75-95.3 (long reading!)

##### 6.) The Emperor, Yasukuni, and State Shinto

READING: “Shintō Shrines by Scheid pp.95.3 to 105

- 7.) Japan's Favorite God: Inari Kami  
READING: from *The Fox and the Jewel*, “A God of One’s Own” pp. 22-39
- 8.) Film  
HOMEWORK: Do reflection exercises
- 9.) Introduction to Buddhism and Buddhist Images  
READING: “Timeline of Buddhism” pp.1-4 AND “A Guide to Japanese Buddhist Sculpture.” pp. 8-29
- 10.) Introduction to Buddhism: Philosophical Concepts  
READING: *The Heart of Understanding* by Thich Nhat Hanh (in appendix) p. 1-18
- 11.) What Happens When I Die: Buddhism and Death  
READING: (Skip ahead) “Mizuko Kuyō and Abortion in Contemporary Japan” by Hoshino pp. 171-190
- 12.) Exam Review  
HOMEWORK: Prepare essays and review
- 13.) MID TERM EXAM
- 14.) In-class Project Work Session  
HOMEWORK: Do homework assignment related to project.
- 15.) The Enlightened World: Zen  
READING: “Zen Buddhism” and “Zen and Japanese Culture” by Mitchell (**Go back in text**) pp. 262.6-267.8; pp. 272.3-275.6
- 16.) Take Me to the Pure Land: Nembutsu and the Jōdo  
READING: “: The Kamakura Period” and “Pure Land Buddhism” by Mitchell pp. 254.5-262.55
- 17.) Devotion to the Lotus Sutra I  
READING: “Nichiren Buddhism” by Mitchell pp. 267.8-272.3  
and “Selected Parables of from the Lotus Sutra” (in Appendix) p. 56-62; p. 150-151
- 18.) Devotion to the Lotus Sutra II: Soka Gakkai  
READING: From the *Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions*, “Soka Gakkai in Japan” p. 269-283.7
- 19.) Soka Gakkai II  
READING: From the *Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions*, “Soka Gakkai in Japan” p. 283.7-305

20.) In-class Project Work Session

HOMEWORK: Do homework assignment related to project.

21.) Creative Project Presentations

HOMEWORK: Prepare comments on student presentations.

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HOMEWORK: Prepare comments on student presentations.

24.) Aum Shinrikyō

READING: “Global Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Case Study of the Aum Shinrikyō” p. 1-6 and “In the Wake of Aum...” p. 398.4-411.7 (appr. 19 pages total)

25.) Bushidō I: Samurai Philosophy and Religion

READING: “Bushidō” by Davies and Ikeno pp.41-50

26.) Bushidō II: Seppuku

READING: *Seppuku* by Rankin (in Appendix) pp.15-24.2; p. 41.3-45.7

27.) Pilgrimage in Japan: Travel and Meaning

From *Understanding Japanese Religion*, “The Three Types of Pilgrimage in Japan p. 127-136 (9 pages)

28.) Pilgrimage in Japan: Shikoku *Henro*

READING: Handout

29.) FILM

HOMEWORK: Do reflection exercises

30.) Exam Review

【Textbooks/Reading Materials】

**\*All course reading materials will be provided by the professor or will be available online**

**Section 4**

【Learning Assessments/Grading Rubric】

Midterm Exam 25%

Final Exam 25%

Creative Project 25%

Homework/Quizzes 12%

Participation 13%

## Section 5

### 【Additional Information】

Regular attendance is required for this course. **2.5% will be deducted from the student's final grade for each absence.** Students are required to be prepared by carefully reading the assignments. The instructor reserves the right to employ unannounced quizzes, take-home assignments, or in-class writings to monitor student preparation.