Japanese Religions: Thought and Practice

Course Description:
While reflecting on our own assumptions about religion and about Japan, this course traces the history and development of the varieties of Japanese religious thought, practice and cultural expression. This course will focus primarily on the major traditions of Japan: Shinto and Buddhism, with some attention to Confucianism, Christianity and New Religions. Read alongside secondary literature for context and interpretation, we will examine a number of primary materials in translation, such as historical documents, Shinto mythical narratives, Buddhist philosophical treatises, ritual manuals, Nō dramas, folk tales, a novel, political tracts, and several films. Some of the themes and issues that we will be exploring in the class are: Religion and the State, Religious Syncretism, Faith and Practice, Gender and Class in Japanese Religions.

Student Learning Outcomes: By the end of the course, students are expected to possess:

1.) A basic literacy of the key terminology and major concepts of Japanese Religious Thought and Practice
2.) A broad historical overview of the religious thought and practice of Japanese religions with attention to the major traditions: Shinto, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity and their interaction with Japanese Culture and Society.
3.) A general understanding of the major issues and problems in the study of Japanese Religions
Mastery of the following research and analytical skills:
1.) How to do a "close reading" of a primary text
2.) How to analyze and critically assess secondary scholarly writing
3.) How to make use of the library and locate relevant resources
4.) How to develop a thesis argument or question and structure a paper

Reading and Preparation: This course involves the reading of both primary texts and secondary literature on various topics in the study of Japanese Religions. Completion of the assigned readings before class is essential for your active engagement in class discussions.

Attendance, and participation (10%): Attendance and Participation in class discussions is required. All other absences will factor into the grade. Participation includes not only talking in class discussions but also asking questions and listening to your peers. All students will be asked to share their close readings of a passage from the primary texts and identify and assess arguments in secondary scholarship.

Discussion Facilitator (10%): Beginning with the second week, we will assign one or more (depending on the week) "discussion facilitators" to lead us in a discussion. A discussion facilitator will provide a 1-2 page outline that includes: (1) a brief synopsis (one paragraph) of the primary work in question, and/or a summation of any secondary readings that clearly identifies the main argument; (2) a brief discussion where you raise important issues for discussion, (3) and formulate insightful questions to stimulate discussion. On the day of the class, the facilitator will distribute a hard copy of the report to the class and facilitate a discussion.

Quizzes (10%): There will be ten (10) short quizzes given in class based on the readings and lectures. These quizzes will be worth 10% of the overall grade and your grade for this portion will be calculated based on your top seven quizzes. No makeup quizzes will be given.

Short Essays: There will be two (2) short essays (20% each) on designated topics. Each essay must be four to five pages in length (double-spaced, standard formatting, 12 point font) and have a bibliography of cited sources. More information on the two short essays will be given in class.

Final Exam: A comprehensive final exam (30%) consisting of identifications and short essays will be given at the end of the semester.

Course Commitment: In addition to the two classes a week (~3 hours), students should expect to spend approximately 3 hours a week with additional time (~4 hours) spent writing papers and studying for quizzes and the final (~4 hours).

Grades and Grading:
   Attendance and Participation: 10%
Quizzes: 10%
Discussion Facilitation: 10%
Short Essay One: 20%
Short Essay Two: 20%
Final Exam: 30%
Total: 100%


Class Policies on Absences and Late Assignments: Unless you have proper documentation (doctor’s note) any absence in the class will be calculated in the attendance portion of the grade. Late papers will be marked off a half letter grade per day that they are late.

Required and Recommended Books:

Course Schedule

First Class: Introductions, Course Overview, Questions and Themes

Second Class: Religion in Ancient Japan

Third Class: Shinto: A Historical Approach
Quiz #1

Fourth Class: The Buddha: Life and Teaching
Fifth Class: The Great Vehicle and The Way of the Bodhisattva

Quiz #2

Seventh Class: Continental Religions and the State

Eight Class: Buddhism and the Nara State

Ninth Class: Karma Stories and the Six Realms
Quiz #3

--------------------------Short Essay One Due

Tenth Class: Tendai Buddhism and Mount Hiei

Eleventh Class: Shingon Buddhism and Mount Koya

Twelfth Class: The Rise of Pure Land Buddhism

Thirteenth Class: Japanese Religions and Tales of War
Required Readings: Excerpts from The Tale of the Heike, trans. Donald Keene, Anthology of Japanese literature : from the earliest era to the mid-nineteenth century.
Fourteenth Class: Japanese Religions in Medieval Japan

Fifteenth Class: Shinran and Ippen: Faith and Practice

Sixteenth Class: Zen: Faith and Practice

Seventeenth Class: Nichiren: Faith and Practice
Quiz #5

Eighteenth Class: Medieval Shinto

Nineteenth Class: Late Medieval Religion and the Arts
Quiz #6

Twentieth Class: The Silence of God

Twenty-first Class: “This Country is a Swamp”
Readings: Shûsaku Endo, Silence, Chapters 7-10 and Appendix, pp. 121-201
Quiz #7

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Twenty-second Class: Japanese Religions and Women in the Tokugawa Period

**Twenty-third Class: The National Learning School**  

**Twenty-fourth Class: Separating Buddhas and Kami in the Meiji Period**  
*Quiz #8*

**Twenty-fifth Class: Religion and the Modern State**  

**Twenty-Sixth Class: Religion in Contemporary Japan**  
*Quiz #9*

**Twenty-Seventh Class: New Religious Movements in Postwar Japan**  

**Twenty-Eighth Class: Death and Funerals in Modern Japan**  
**Viewing:** *Okuribito* “Departures” directed by Yōjirō Takita, 2008.  
*Movie Showing of Okuribito “Departures” TBA*  
*Quiz #10*

**Final Review**

**Final Exam TBA**