Religion, Tradition and Temple-tourism in Kyoto

AKP Spring 2027

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CLASS TIMES: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:55–4:25

OFFICE HOUR: Mondays after class or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Filled with over two thousand temples and shrines, the ancient capital of Kyoto provides the ideal setting for the study of Japanese religions. Temples and shrines, however, are not only sites of faith, but locales where religion, tradition, culture, and tourism intersect. Against this vibrant and complex background accommodating diverse modes of religious practice and sightseeing, this course explores selected aspects of Shinto and Japanese Buddhism in historical as well as contemporary context.

We will examine present-day attitudes to religion, lived by many as inherited tradition, in conjunction with the enormous popularity of the city's temples and shrines that function as promoters of cultural identity and World Heritage tourism. Drawing on the religious landscape of Kyoto and nearby sites, classes will be supplemented with organized fieldtrips, and student assignments will be based both on readings as well as temple/shrine visits and first-hand observance of ceremonies, festivals, and practices.

TEXTBOOK AND OTHER READINGS

All weekly readings are posted on Moodle.

1. Textbook: Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: The MacMillan Press, 1991). Selected chapters.
2. Other readings listed below on Course Outline.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and participation in classes and field trips, timely completion of the required readings, and contributions to class discussions (20%).
2. Class presentation based on research and group/individual temple fieldwork (20%).
3. Three assignments (60%): shrine fieldwork (20%), interview analysis (20%) , course review assignment (20%).

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Jan 11 (Mon) Course Introduction

Jan 13 (Wed) Shrines and Temples of Kyoto
Field Trip to Yoshida Jinja and Shinnyodō
Reading: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 1–22.

Jan 18 (Mon) Shinto Shrines: Spaces, Structures, and Kami
Reading: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 23–27, 55–76.
Also recommended: Bernhard Scheid, "Shintō Shrines: Traditions and Transformations," in *Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions*, ed. Inken Prohl and John Nelson (Brill, 2012), pp. 75–95.
Recommended resources:
Kokugakuin University's Encyclopedia of Shinto at:
https://www2.kokugakuin.ac.jp/e-shinto/
Mark Schumacher on Shinto priesthood and shrine maidens at:
https://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/shinto-priesthood.html
Interview with Shintō Priest Florian Wiltschko here:
https://www.greenshinto.com/2016/11/27/florian-wiltschko-shinto-priest-part-one/
https://www.greenshinto.com/2016/12/08/florian-wiltschko-priest-part-2/

Jan 20 (Wed) **Field Trip to Kitano Tenmangū:** *Hanmantō-sai* 半萬燈祭 Lantern Festival
Due: Year of the Sheep Homework

Jan 25 (Mon) Imperial Shinto and「パワースポット」Spiritual Tourism: Ise Jingū and Kyoto's Himukai Daijingū
Readings: William Coaldrake, "The Grand Shrines of Ise and Izumo: The Appropriation of Vernacular Architecture by Early Ruling Authority" in *Architecture and Authority in Japan* (Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies, 1996), pp. 16–51; Mark Teeuwen and John Breen, *A Social History of the Ise Shrines: Divine Capital* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 1–7.
Highly recommended viewing: "Building Eternity: The Kami-Human Landscape of Izumo Taisha 永遠を建てる− 出雲大社カミとヒトの風景へ" (ROLES documentary, 2025, 30 minutes, focused on 60-year rebuilding cycle of Izumo Taisha; interviews with Shinto priests): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMOjfyworM0

Jan 27 (Wed) Japanese Buddhist Temples: Structures, Buddhas, and Kami
Readings: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 30 (last paragraph)–40; Penelope Mason, *History of Japanese Art* (2nd ed. Prentice Hall, 2004), pp. 57–65.

Reference guide to Buddhist Pantheon: Nishikawa Kyōtarō and Emily J. Sano, "Buddhist Imagery" in *The Great Age of Buddhist Sculpture, AD 600–1300* (University of Washington Press, 1983), pp. 42–46.

Jan 29 (Fri) 1:10pm — **Field Trip to Fushimi Inari**: Tourism, Tradition, and Practice at Inariyama
Reading: Karen Smyers, "Inari Pilgrimage: Following One's Path on the Mountain," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24:3-4 (1997), pp. 427–452.
Also recommended*: Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 175–193.

Feb 1 (Mon) — Mt. Hiei: Tendai Buddhism, "Mother Mountain of Japanese Buddhism," Asceticism, and World Heritage Tourism
Due: Shrine Fieldwork Assignment
Reading: Wm. Theodore de Bary, Donald Keene, George Tanabe, and Paul Varley (comp.), *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (2nd ed.), vol.1: From Earliest Times to 1600 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 123–131.
Viewing: "The Monks Risking Death on an Extraordinary Journey," Journeyman Pictures (20 minutes) at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S06oMxdt40A
Also recommended: Robert Rhodes, "The *Kaihōgyō* Practice of Mt. Hiei," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14:2-3 (1987), pp. 185–202 at https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/2354

Feb 3 (Wed) — Festivals: Religion, Tradition, and Festival Tourism
Setsubun Field Trip to Darumadera

Feb 5 (Fri) — **Field Trip to Tendai-sect Temple Sekizanzen'in**
Circumambulating Japanese Religion

Feb 8 (Mon) — Shingon Buddhism and Faith in Kōbō Daishi
Readings: *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, pp. 153–157; *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 112–116.
Viewings: Heart Sutra on YouTube
Shingon traditional version with drumming:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Gilg7OstyA
Hatsune Miku version:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCzSNssXGWI
Modern musical versions by Buddhist monks:
Heart Sutra' vocal live looping remix by Yogetsu Akasaka, a Japanese Zen Buddhist monk:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvIGCMhjkvw
Kanho Yakushiji versions:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm4hTcRhoqI

Feb 10 (Wed) — Pilgrimage and Tourism: Shikoku Henro and its Kyoto Mini-replicas

	Reading: Ian Reader, "Constructing Identities Through the Shikoku Pilgrimage," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 48:2 (2021), pp. 299–319. Also recommended: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 134–167; John Shultz, "Pilgrim Leadership Rendered in HTML: Bloggers and the Shikoku Henro" in *Japanese Religions on the Internet: Innovation, Representation and Authority*, eds. Erica Baffelli, Ian Reader and Birgit Staemmler (Routledge, 2011), pp. 101–117.
Feb 15 (Mon)	Mountains and Religion: Shugendō Mountain Asceticism and Lay Practitioners Documentary Film: "Shugendō Now"(in-class viewing) Readings: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 107–111, 116–123; Lindsey DeWitt, "Lifting the Barrier: Women's Access to Sacred Mountains in Japan", *Kyoto Journal* 78 (2013), pp. 34–37.
Feb 17 (Wed)	Discussion: Religion and Contemporary Japanese Society Interview Assignment discussion (Assignment due on Feb 22) Readings: Michael Pye, "Leading Patterns in Everyday Japanese Religion," *Sphinx, Yearbook 2008-9* (Societas Scientiarum Fennica), pp. 45-53 (rev. 2015); Jolyon Baraka Thomas, "Tong in Cheek, Just in Case" (2015): https://sacredmattersmagazine.com/tongue-in-cheek-just-in-case/ Viewing: Matsuyama Daiko, "Reasons for religion -- a quest for inner peace," TEDxKyoto talk (2014, in Japanese, English subtitles available under settings, 14:31 mins.): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mAPA3YKC_A&feature=youtu.be Reference materials: Noriko Iwai, "Measuring Religion in Japan" (2017, Pew Research Center) at: https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/11/Religion20171117.pdf Pew Research Center, "Religion and Spirituality in East Asian Societies" Report (June 2024, survey conducted in 2023): https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2024/06/PR_2024.06.17_religion-in-east-asia_report.pdf
Feb 22 (Mon)	Film: "Okuribito" (Departures) **Due: Interview Assignment**
Feb 24 (Wed)	Discussion on "Okuribito"
Mar 1 (Mon)	NO CLASS (for 1/29 Fushimi Inari)
Mar 3 (Wed)	AKP Spring Trip (Mar 3–5)
Mar 8 (Mon)	Mortuary Rites and Ancestors Reading: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 77–106.

	Reference material: Elizabeth Kenney and Edmund T. Gilday, "Mortuary Rites in Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27:3-4 (2000), pp. 167–173. Recommended readings: Whelan, *Kansai Cool*, pp. 31–37 "Gratitude"; Mark Rowe, "Where the Action Is: Sites of Contemporary Sōtō Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 31:2 (2004), pp. 357–388: https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/journal/6/issue/169/article/1155
Mar 10, 15 (Wed, Mon)	***Zen, Pure Land, and Nichiren Temple Presentations*** Readings: *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, pp. 205–217, 292–295, 306–311. Further readings for presenters listed on the presentation handout.
Mar 12 (Fri)	**Field Trip to Rinzai-Zen Temple Tenryūji**: Zazen Meditation in World Heritage Site Reading: John Dougill, *Zen Gardens and Temples of Kyoto* (Tuttle, 2017), pp. 18–25, 100–103.
Mar 17 (Wed)	Socially Engaged Religion: Triple Disaster in Fukushima; COVID-19 Discussion on "Buddhism after the Tsunami" Viewing: "Buddhism after the Tsunami: The Souls of Zen" (2012, one hour) at: https://vimeo.com/158309233 Also recommended: Levi McLaughlin, "What Have Religious Groups Done After 3.11?" (Part 1), *Religion Compass* 7:8 (2013), pp. 294–308.
Mar 22 (Mon)	Vernal Equinox Day (no classes)
Mar 24 (Wed)	**Field Trip to Android Kannon at Kōdaiji**
Mar 29 (Mon)	Socially Engaged and Experimental Religion Reading: John K. Nelson, *Experimental Buddhism: Innovation and Activism in Contemporary Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), pp. 112–140 (also recommended: pp. 164–187).
Mar 31(Wed) **6:00 PM**	**Evening Field Trip: Light-up at Pure-Land Temple Chion'in**
Ap 5 (Mon)	Course Review
Ap 7 (Wed)	**Due at midnight: Course Review Assignment** NO CLASS (for 2/5 field trip to Sekizanzen'in)
Ap 12 (Mon)	NO CLASS (for 3/12 field trip to Tenryūji)