Syllabus
RELIGIOUS STUDIES 221
Japanese Religious Tradition
Fall, 2006
TTh 10:00AM Steiner 305

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is designed as a seminar with two primary ambitions. The first is that each member of the seminar achieve a broad familiarity with the main historical and cultural features of religion in Japan. The second ambition is that you develop a sense and style of academic inquiry that will both suit your own individual strengths and interests and engage more general issues of understanding and interpretation in the academic study of religion. It would of course be foolish to imagine that we can, in one semester, plumb the depths of the vast array of religious evidence available to us. I have had to be radically selective in choosing appropriately illustrative evidence, but I hope that my selections prove both interesting and engaging.

After a short historical and thematic orientation, our attention will turn first to issues related to the visit of a group of atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima to campus and to our class during the week of September 18. These reflections will not only prepare us in some ways for the visit, but will also illustrate some important issues and problems in the study of Japanese religion. In Week 5, we will begin reading William LaFleur’s Liquid Life, which provides an interesting historical and thematic introduction to Japanese religion focused on the practice of abortion. This will take us up to the Fall break.

When we return from break, we will spend a week discussing early modern pilgrimages associated with the famous imperial “Shinto” shrine at Ise, a case study fascinating not only for its historical details but also for the theoretical frame in which the story is told. We will then look briefly at a set of unusual cases of “new” religions before concluding our survey with what I hope will be a very engaging and unsettling book called Practically Religious, which takes a whole new approach to Japanese religion, raising valuable new questions about the study of religion in general.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:
1) You are expected to do the readings for each class in advance of the relevant meeting and are expected to attend all class sessions and contribute actively to class discussions. A quick glance at the class schedule will alert you to the place of each reading in the week’s agenda. (20%)
2) You are expected to make regular DISCUSSION BOARD contributions and to follow the discussions even when you do not have time to actively participate. Beyond assigned postings (e.g., for discussion leadership), each student will be expected to post at least six (6) original contributions and at least 12 substantive replies to others’ postings. (20%)
3) Over the course of the semester, each student will be responsible for helping to lead one or more discussions. We will decide the mechanics of this during the first few weeks of the semester. More details and instructions will also be made available on the Blackboard; student facilitators will be expected to meet with me at least 48 hours prior to your scheduled turns. (20%)
4) Reflection Papers: Each student will write 3 short (2-3 page) critical reflection papers over the course of the semester on a schedule that is convenient to you. More detailed instructions and guidance will be provided in class and on the Blackboard. (20%)
5) You will have the opportunity to write a term paper (12-15 pages of text) exploring some topic that strikes you as interesting and fruitful. I will expect you to follow a rather unforgiving research and writing schedule throughout the course of the semester so that you can be proud of your finished product. We will discuss further
details about the term project and the schedule in class and on the Blackboard.
(20%)
If at any time you don’t understand what is expected, PLEASE DON’T HESITATE TO ASK.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES/READINGS

Note: Asterisks denote readings available through e-reserve.

Aug 24 Introductions; Discussion of handout

Aug 29 Historical Overview (Yusa, Ch. 1-3)
Aug 31 Historical Overview (Yusa, Ch. 4-6)

Sep 5 Thematic Overview (AJSI, pp. 1-48)
Sep 7 *Ebersole, “Tama Belief and Practice in Ancient Japan”

Sep 12 Ritualized Memory (“JRP, “Shingon Services”; *Gilday, “Dancing…”)
Sep 14 Video: “Rites of Remembrance”

Sep 21 Class visit: Atomic Bomb Survivors from Hiroshima

Sep 28 “Original Concepts” (continued)

Oct 3 Liquid Life, Part II: Historical Processes
Oct 5 Two Edo-Period Preachers (AJSI, pp. 49-72)

Oct 12 A Scholarly Debate (*Book Review and Response—details in class)

Oct 16-20 FALL BREAK

Oct 24 Ise Pilgrimage (*Davis, Part I)
Oct 26 Ise Pilgrimage (*Davis, Part II)

Nov 7-9 “New Religions” (*Inoue; *Turnbull; *Harrington; AJSI, 80-91)

Nov 14 Practically Religious, “Introduction” and Chapter 1
Nov 16 Practically Religious, Ch. 2

Nov 21 No class—reading day

Nov 28 Practically Religious, Ch. 3-4
Nov 30 Practically Religious, Ch. 5

Dec 5 Practically Religious, Ch. 6-7
Dec 7 Conclusions