

Religion and Popular Culture in Contemporary Japan
SCAR 2TT3 – Term I, 2022/23

- Instructor: Dr. Mark Rowe
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- Office Hours: By appointment.
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- Lectures: Mondays 2:30-4:20 pm, PGCLL M12
- Teaching Assistant: TBA
- Tutorials: Wednesdays 1:30-2:20 MDCL 1009 and Thursdays 1:30-12:20 PGCLL M22

Description

This course provides an introduction to the study of Japanese popular culture and religions. Our historical scope (“time of the gods” through 3/11), our source materials (archaeology to text to multi-media) and our questions will encourage a comprehensive understanding of contemporary Japan. This is a thematic course. Each week we will take a particular theme such as “marathon monks”, “Godzilla”, or “Christianity” and examine particular manifestations of that theme in different historical periods and cultural spaces. This thematic approach has the benefit of allowing us to cover a wide variety of materials in a short period of time, but there is an inherent danger. Without the linear structure and comfort of a historical narrative, students often have difficulty contextualizing things and figuring out what they are supposed to know. It is essential that you keep up with the readings, learn the details, and study the general historical periods. You will need to know, for example, that Kūkai came before Tezuka Osamu, Heian before Edo, and that Nichiren was the famous 13th century Buddhist priest who founded the religion that still bears his name. Master your history.

A second potential pitfall in a thematic course is the tendency to essentialize material and draw ahistorical connections. For example, in our week on visual culture some of you will be tempted to see contemporary Japanese comic books (*manga*) as an inevitable outgrowth of 17th century woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*). They are not. *Manga* are a modern phenomenon that grew out of the political radicalism of the 1960s. Connecting *manga* to *ukiyo-e* is an ideological move, not a historical one. You will learn the difference.

Requirements

Weekly Quizzes: 3 quizzes of 10 points each = 30% of total grade.

- Short, in-class quiz each week (during tutorial)
- These quizzes require students to identify figures, time periods, and topics from readings and lectures. Students may also be asked to put major events and figures into historical order.
- I will provide lists of terms and figures that you should know.

Written/Creative Responses: 70% (7 assignments x 10%)

- Each week you will be asked to write 500-600 words on a given topic or theme. Many of the weeks will offer a non-written option.
- 11 assignments will be posted on Avenue. You will be able to choose which 7 you do.
- Students who want to improve their grades can do an additional assignment and choose their best 7 grades.
- Each week's assignment is out of 10 points.
 - 1 point for turning in a complete assignment on time.
 - 4 points for referencing course readings.
 - 2 points for grammar/spelling/proofreading
 - 3 points for clarity and creativity of argument/thesis/idea.
- **All assignments will be submitted online by Sunday at midnight of the week they are assigned.**

NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO FINAL EXAM FOR THIS COURSE.

Your Responsibilities:

You are responsible for all material on this syllabus and for making up missed lectures and assignments. Course content and scheduling may change, all notifications will be made on the course web page and, when possible, in lecture and tutorial. Students are responsible for regularly checking the course web page.

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

The course website can be found on Avenue to Learn.

Note: Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used.

Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

You are also responsible for bringing concerns about grading to the attention of your TA and myself in a timely manner. This means that if you have questions about your grade on a particular assignment or test, you must let us know within two weeks of the official posting of that grade. Your concerns must be specific. Please do not come to us with: “I think I deserve a better grade,” or “I worked really hard.” Please also be aware that if you ask me to double check your grade on an assignment, there is just as much chance that your grade will go down as up.

Academic Dishonesty Statement:

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

If you are ever in a situation where you are not sure if what you are submitting constitutes plagiarism, contact me immediately.

McMaster Student Absence Form

Use of the MSAF

The McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF) (<http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/>) is a self-reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report MEDICAL absences that last up to 5 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work (that is less than 30% of the course grade). Please note, this tool cannot be used during any final examination period. You may submit a maximum of ONE Academic Work Missed request per term. It is YOUR responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation. If you are absent for more than 5 days, exceed one request per term, are absent for a reason other than medical, or have missed work worth 30% or more of the final grade, you MUST visit your Faculty Office.

You may be required to provide supporting documentation. This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence.

Social Sciences Faculty E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion. Email Forwarding in MUGSI: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/support/email/emailforward.html>
*Forwarding will take effect 24-hours after students complete the process at the above link.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

Required Readings

1. RESERVE: Michiko Yusa 2002. *Japanese Religious Traditions* (JRT), Prentice Hall. I will put three copies of this on reserve (three is the maximum allowed). I strongly advise you to read over that book and create a timeline of Japanese periods/events/and figures so you have a sufficient overview of Japanese history to understand what's going on week to week. It is a short book, you can read the whole thing in an hour.
2. In order to keep costs down for students (i.e. zero dollars), we will be making extensive use of online sources. These are REQUIRED READINGS. You should download them, print them out, and read them like your other readings.
3. Note: Readings should be completed by Monday of the week in which they are listed.

Course Outline

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE – CHECK COURSE PAGE REGULARLY)

1. Week One: Framing the Course

- a. September 12: Japan – Overview of Course

Readings

- Students should start reading through JRT and familiarizing themselves with the different Japanese historical periods. Students should also spend this week

bragging about taking the course and sipping on the salty tears of frustration and envy emanating from their friends who are not taking SCAR 2TT3. Fools.

****NO TUTORIALS THIS WEEK** Tutorials start in week 2.**

2. Week Two: Myriad gods

- a. September 19: Introducing Japan; Kami and the genealogy of a nation

Readings

- JRT: 8-30
- Reader, “Turning to the Gods in Times of Trouble” (avenue)
- Kojiki (avenue)

3. Week Three: Religious Technologies

- a. September 26: Buddhism and the State; Esoteric Buddhism – Innate Buddhahood

Readings

- JRT: 31-59
- “Enlightenment in this Bodily Existence” Kūkai (avenue)

4. Week Four: Telling Stories

- a. October 3: Avatars and Early Stories
 - i. Gongen 権現
 - ii. Yugio to Death Note
 - iii. Birth in the Pure Land

First Quiz – at beginning of class.

Readings

- Deal, “Women and Japanese Buddhism” (avenue)
- Rambelli, “Honji Suijaku” (avenue)
- Genshin (avenue)

October 10 – Reading Week, No class.

5. Week Five: Warriors, Christianity, and Performance

- a. October 17: More Stories and Performance
 - i. Tale of Heike
 - ii. Christianity
 - iii. *Etoki* 絵解き
 - iv. *Kabuki* 歌舞伎

Readings

- Sources of Japanese Tradition “The Way of the Warrior” (avenue)
- Endō Shūsaku, “The Final Martyrs” (avenue)
- JRT 60 – 77

6. Week Six: Manga and Marathon Monks

- a. October 24: Manga and Marathon Monks of Mt. Hiei
 - i. Woodblock Prints 浮世絵
 - ii. Manga
 - iii. Marathon Monks

Readings:

- Thomas, “Shūkyō Asobi and Miyazaki Hayao’s Anime. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (February 2007), pp. 73-95. Available online through JSTOR via the library.
- JRT 92 – 108
- Stevens, “The Path of the Spiritual Athlete” (avenue)

7. Week 8: Embodied Culture and Bathing

- a. October 31: Ode to the Nod; Bathing
 - i. The language of *ki* 気
 - ii. Bathing in Japan

Readings

- Bathing in Japan (Online)

Second Quiz – at beginning of class.

8. Week Nine: Transgression, Taboo, and Discrimination

- a. November 7: Transgression/Travel/Pilgrimage; *Buraku* and discrimination in Japan

Readings

- JRT 78 – 91
- Reader, “Legends, Miracles and Faith in Kobo Daishi” (avenue)
- Hane, “The Outcaste in Japan” (avenue)

9. Week Ten: New Religions and Aum

- a. November 14: What’s new and what’s not about the “New Religions” of Japan?

Readings

- Hardacre, “World View of New Religions” (avenue)
- McLaughlin, “Sōka Gakkai” (avenue)
- Thomas, “Horrific “Cults” and Comic Religion Manga after Aum”
 - *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* – just paste the title of the article into the Google.

10. Week 11: Atomic Bombing to 3/11

- a. November 21: The Atomic Bomb; Godzilla; The Tohoku Disaster

Readings

- Allison, “Millennial Monsters” (avenue)
- Yano, “Panic Attacks” (avenue)
- This Precious Life (avenue)
- Allison on Precarity (avenue)

11. Week Twelve

- a. November 28: Death, burial, and contemporary Buddhist priests in Japan.

Readings

- Rowe (avenue)

12. Last Class

- a. December 5: weddings

b. Quiz 5

Readings

- JRT 109 – 113
- White, “Perfectly Japanese” (avenue)
- Fisch, “The Rise of the Chapel Wedding in Japan”
Japanese Journal of Religious Studies – you should know by now.

Third Quiz – at beginning of class.

Final Exam: Nope.