Syllabus: Reflective Perspectives on “Japanese Religions”

Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies
Fall 2016

Instructor: Professor Jun’ichi ISOMAE
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Classroom: Fusokan Building, Room No. 504.
Class date and time: Tuesday and Friday, 1:10-2:40 p.m.

Contact information: Please feel free to contact me by email isomae@nichibun.ac.jp.
We are able to meet before or after our class. When asking questions about course content, papers, etc. it is best to ask these questions in class so that others may benefit from the responses.

Objective and Content:

Today critical scholars of Japanese religion agree that there does not exist such a unified entity called “Japanese religion.” Not just “Japanese religion,” but also the concept of “religion” itself, which has been thought of as a universal concept, is also questioned by scholars of religion who have shown that the modern concept of “religion,” previously understood as universal, is actually derived from Protestantism. In this sense, we can understand religious phenomena in general to result from dynamic interactions between the Protestant notion of “religion” and non-Western indigenous religious traditions. Consequently Japanese religion can be comprehended as a hybrid space occupied by plural forms of “Japanese religion”, a space where institutionalized notions of “Japan” and “religion” must be always interrogated.

This course provides a basic guide to how to approach the phenomena of “Japanese religions” by strategically focusing on changes from the early modern to modern periods because this is the period when the Protestant notion of religion came to Japan and interacted with local traditions. It is necessary to look into this period in order to reflect on our own
western-derived assumptions when investigating the concept of “religion.”
The course is divided into four sections, each of which serves to sharpen one
particular perspective for understanding religious phenomena as traces of
human activity: first, conceptual belief and bodily practice (concept of
“religion”); second, peace and violence (state power and colonialism); third,
indigenization and universalization (folk religion and “world religion”); and
four, sacralization and discrimination (women and outcasts). Your study of
these perspectives will be strengthened if you are familiar with postcolonial
criticism, anthropology and critical theory. These theoretical discussions
provide key concepts for understanding religious activities.

Requirements:
1. Reading Assignments
   You are required to read the assigned books and papers listed in CLASS SCHEDULE,
   except for the books and papers listed as RECOMMENDED. Reading materials are
   available in PDF format by email or reserve copies in the KCJS office.

2. Attendance and Class Participation count for 20% of the course grade. Regular
   attendance and oral discussion at all scheduled class meetings and field trips is required.
   Unexcused absences will lower your course grade.

3. Class Participation counts for 10% of the course grade.
   Each students is required to make three presentations with handouts (see Writing
   Assignments) in addition to a self-introduction and his or her oral commentaries on assigned
   readings during the semester. The perspective of your presentation; How to explain the topics
   and key terms he or she addresses; How to contextualize his or her argument; How to criticize
   his argument.

3. Writing Assignments (all papers should be double-spaced and in 12 point font)
   Three short discussion papers, and one research paper on a topic chosen by the
   student.
   (a) Three Short Discussion papers (each 5-6 pages) count for 30%.
       Each student must prepare a discussion papers for his or her oral presentation at least
two days prior to the day of the presentation.
(b) One research paper (8-12 pages) related to your special, individual interest in “Japanese Religions”, which counts for 40% of the course grade. Due date for this paper is on December 15.

Each page must be clearly numbered. Include a cover sheet listing the title of your paper or the assignment, your name, title of this course, and the date when you submitted the paper.

Class Schedule

September 6: Orientation meeting. 5 min. oral presentation: Introduce yourself; talk about your education, the field of specialization, academic interests, etc.


September 9: Instructor’s PPT presentation, “Religions in Northeast Japan Disaster.”

Section 1. The Concept “Religion” and Westernization


Recommended:


**Section 2. State Shinto, Public Sphere and Secularism**


**Recommended:**


(ftp://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/webforum/archive.shtml)

**Section 3. Sui Generis “Religion” and the Politics of Religious Studies**


Recommended:

Section 4. Buddhism, “World Religion” and Indigenization


October 28: Field Trip: Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto.

Recommended:

Carmen Blacker, The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in

Section 5. Folk Religion, Emperor Worship and Appropriation


November 18: Field Trip: Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto.

Recommended:


Section 7. The Sacred, Impurity and Discrimination


November 29: Giorgio Agamben, “Part Two: Homo Sacer,” in Homo Sacer:

December 3: Ashihara-bashi, Osaka Human Right Museum and Ikasuri Shrine in Osaka


Recommended:
網野善彦『中世の非人と遊女』講談社学術文庫, 2005.

December 9: General Discussion: Rethinking of “Japanese Religions”
Final meeting. 10 min. oral presentation: What do you learn from the course “Japanese Religions”? Does “Japanese Religion” or “Japanese Religions” exist as any kind of entity? What is the relationship between Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity and folk religion? What kind of difference and similarity to compare with Judeo-Christian tradition?