

Carmen Tamas

## **Ritual practices and daily rituals: an introduction to the anthropology of Japan**

### Course overview

The role of ritual practices in a country that has more than one festival on any given day of the year cannot be denied. It is a highly significant one that has pervaded the everyday life, where many gestures have acquired a ritual meaning, be it social or sacred. The present course aims to offer an overview of contemporary Japanese society with a focus on sacred rituals (related to religious practices) and profane rituals, those daily practices that have gained ritual characteristics: cyclic repetition in a pre-determined space, with pre-determined participants, roles, and activities.

### Course goals

The students will become familiar with general concepts related to anthropology and ritual studies, and they will be able to apply them to contemporary Japanese society. They will be able to differentiate between universal and culture-specific aspects, and use this knowledge to analyze both sacred and daily practices, as well as enhance their intercultural communication skills.

### Grading criteria

Class participation 10%

Response papers (2 papers, 800-1000 words each) 20%

Midterm 20%

Ethnography report (presentation 20% + paper 30%)

- The response papers are based on the readings indicated in the syllabus. Students may choose, but the response paper must be submitted by the deadline indicated in the syllabus (deadlines differ depending on the reading).
- The midterm includes questions from topics covered during weeks 1~6.
- The ethnography report is based on participant observation + academic research. The topic should be chosen by the midterm the latest. Oral presentations will be given during the last week of the course, and the written report (4500~5000 words) will be submitted during exam week.

Textbook: Joy Hendry—*Understanding Japanese Society*, Routledge 2019

## Class schedule (2 classes/week)

- Week 1** Class overview. Introduction to anthropology and ritual studies. Japanese mythology  
Textbook: Chapter 1. Sources of Japanese identity: historical and mythological foundations of Japan  
Reading: "Seeing the World" (Joy Hendry—*An Introduction to Social Anthropology*, Palgrave 2016)  
Takeshi Matsumae—"The Heavenly Rock-Grotto Myth and the Chinkon Ceremony" (text to be distributed by the instructor; response paper deadline: week 2)
- Week 2** Encounters with the Other. Social structure and social practices  
Textbook: Chapter 2. Socialisation and classification  
Reading: Gavin James Campbell—"Mortification, Mockery, and Dissembling: Western Adventures in Japanese Etiquette" (Jan Bardsley & Laura Miller—*Manners and Mischief. Gender, Power, and Etiquette in Japan*, University of California Press 2011) (response paper deadline: week 3)
- Week 3** Community and daily practices  
Textbook: Chapter 3. Community and neighborhood  
Reading: Kenji Hashimoto & Jackie Miyasaka—"Class Structure in Contemporary Japan"  
Kalman D. Applbaum—"Marriage with the Proper Stranger: Arranged Marriage in Metropolitan Japan"  
David Chiavacci—"From Class Struggle to General Middle-Class Society to Divided Society: Societal Models of Inequality in Postwar Japan" (texts to be distributed by the instructor; response paper deadline: week 4)
- Week 4** Ritual Japan. Shrine and temple, religious syncretism  
Textbook: Chapter 7. Religious influences  
Reading: John K. Nelson—*A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine*, University of Washington Press 2000 (Kindle edition available; response paper based on one chapter, deadline week 5)
- Week 5** Ascetic practices in contemporary Japan  
Textbook: Chapter 7  
Reading: Carmen Tamas—"Purification, Ecstasy and Enlightenment: Asceticism within the Nichiren Sect" (text to be distributed by the instructor)
- Week 6** Purification rituals and practices  
Reading: Carmen Tamas—"The Ritual Significance of Purification Practices in Japan"  
Hitomi Tomomura—"Birth-giving and Avoidance Taboo: Women's Body versus the Historiography of "Ubuya"" (texts to be distributed by the instructor; response paper based on the article by H. Tomomura, deadline week 7)
- Week 7** Midterm. Introduction to Japanese Festivals

Reading: Herbert Plutschow—"The Structure of the Festival" (*Matsuri: The Festivals of Japan*, Routledge 1996) (response paper deadline week 8)

**Week 8** Festivals and rituals

Textbook: Chapter 8. Ritual and the life cycle

Reading: Herbert Plutschow—"What are Matsuri" (*Matsuri: The Festivals of Japan*, Routledge 1996) (response paper deadline week 9)

**Week 9** Field trip (a visit to festival; the date may change depending on the actual school calendar)

**Week 10** Rituals and daily practices

Textbook: Chapter 8.

Reading: Emiko Namihira—"Pollution in the Folk Belief System" (text to be distributed by the instructor)

Joy Hendry—"Humidity, hygiene, or ritual care: some thoughts on wrapping as a social phenomenon" (Eyal Ben Ari, Brian Moeran, James Valentine—*Unwrapping Japan. Society and culture in an anthropological perspective*, Routledge 2011) (response paper deadline week 11)

**Week 11** Theater as entertainment and sacred practice

Textbook: Chapter 10. Arts, entertainment and leisure

Reading: Annegret Bergmann—"From Pleasure to Leisure. Attempts at Decommmercialization of Japanese Popular Theater" (Sepp Linhart & Sabine Frühstück—*The Culture of Japan as Seen through Its Leisure*, State of New York University Press 1998) (response paper deadline week 12)

**Week 12** Sacred performances. Review (+ Japanese theater performance in Umeda, Osaka; the date to be decided according to the school calendar)

Textbook: Chapter 10.

Reference: Benito Ortolani—*The Japanese Theatre. From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism*, Princeton University Press 1995

**Week 13** Ethnography reports. Presentations

The final paper (4500~5000 words) must be submitted during the final exam week.

### **Academic integrity policy**

As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated.

**For students with different abilities**

If you are a student with a disability and have a Disability Services-certified 'Accommodation Letter' from your home institution, please send me this letter before the first day of class to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation and do not have an accommodations letter, you should contact the [Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement at Columbia University \(uge@columbia.edu\)](mailto:uge@columbia.edu).