

POPULAR RELIGION IN CHANGING JAPAN

Catalog: RELGST 1572 / HIST 1741
Class Nbrs: 27444/27446
Term: Fall 2013 (2141)
Class Time: Mon./Wed. 4:30 –5:45 p.m.
Classroom: Cathedral of Learning 239

Instructor: Clark Chilson
Office: CL 2610
Telephone: 412-624-5977
E-mail: chilson@pitt.edu
Office hour: Wednesday
2:30–3:30 p.m. or by appointment

Course Description

The vast majority of Japanese when asked about their religion, say they do not have one. The Japan General Social Survey found that in 2003 only 11.8% of Japanese claimed to have faith in any religion. Yet, there is other evidence that the Japanese are quite religious. At New Year's, for example, about 70% of the population will visit a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple to pray for good fortune in the coming year. About half have a Buddhist and/or Shinto altar in their homes. And, when a relative dies, the majority will hire a Buddhist priest to perform the funeral and post-mortuary rites. Overall, we might interpret recent data on religion in contemporary Japan as showing a low level of religious commitment among the Japanese. This raises a question, which we will grapple with throughout this course: Does religion matter in Japan? If so, how and to what extent does it matter? If not, why does it fail to have relevancy for so many Japanese today? So students can effectively grapple with these questions, this course will introduce fundamental practices and teachings related to Japanese religions and particularly Buddhism.

Course Objectives

By engaging with the course materials and assignments, you learn to do the following:

1. Demonstrate basic knowledge of key practices, doctrines, and concepts related to religion in modern Japan
2. Analyze data on religion from different perspectives
3. Formulate thought provoking questions
4. Make your own discoveries related to religion in contemporary Japan
5. Support claims with cogent evidence

In short, this course is intended not only to make you more knowledgeable about religion in contemporary Japan, but also to improve your ability to analyze texts, evaluate arguments, and discover new ideas.

Required Books

- Reader, Ian. 1991. *Religion in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Ohtani, Koshin. 2009. *The Buddha's Wish for the World*. New York: American Buddhist Study Center.
- Rowe, Mark M. 2011. *Bonds of Death: Temples, Burial, and the Transformation of Contemporary Japanese Buddhism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- van de Wetering, Janwillem. 1974. *The Empty Mirror: Experiences in a Japanese Zen Monastery*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Uchiyama Kosho. 2004. *Opening the Hand of Thought: Foundations of Zen Buddhist Practice*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Online Course Component

Course materials, such as this syllabus and course readings, are posted online using courseweb (also known as Blackboard). Courseweb can be accessed as follows:

- Go to <http://courseweb.pitt.edu/>
- Click “Login”
- Enter your Pitt username and password
- Click on “RELGST 1572 Popular Religion in a Changing Japan”

New materials may be added to courseweb during the term.

Grading

- Participation, attendance, and preparation: 10%
- In-class midterm exam 30% (October 9, Wednesday)
- Essay on mortuary practices in Japan: 25% (Due November 11, Monday)
- Take-home final exam 35% (Due December 10 [Tuesday] by 2:00 p.m.)

Assignments and Grading Criteria

Participation, attendance, and preparation: You will receive high marks for this grade if you contribute to the learning environment by coming to every class prepared and by being willing and able to participate in class activities. One or two absences will not negatively influence your grade. Beyond three absences, one point will be deducted for each absence. For example, if you are absent four times, one point will be deducted from your overall grade; five absences will result in a two-point deduction. Please note that no distinction will be made between unexcused and excused absences. Every absence, regardless of the reason, will be treated equally and simply as an absence.

You will also get credit toward your participation grade by engaging in class activities such as the following: 1) presenting a short overview of the reading for the day and offering suggestions for how to engage with it; 2) writing thoughtful answers that show mastery of the material in brief in-class writing assignments; 3) participating in discussion in a way that fosters understanding and insight.

In-class midterm exam: This will consist of essay questions and perhaps short answer ones. More information on the types of questions that will appear on the exam as well as the general principles for grading it will be given in class before the exam. If due to extraordinary circumstances you miss an exam, you may be offered an opportunity to make it up during the final exam period or write an essay 2000 to 2300 words in length on an assigned problem or problems.

Essay on mortuary practices in Japan: This essay will be based on assigned readings. In it you will answer an essay question that will be given out one week in advance. The essay should be 800 to 1000 words in length of which no more than 150 words should be quotations. It will be graded on the basis of the following criteria:

- Clearly answers the question.
- Provides a defensible main claim (i.e., thesis statement) that is neither too specific nor too general. Underline this main claim in essay.
- Shows intellectual engagement with scholarship in the assigned readings, particularly Rowe’s *Bonds of the Dead*. (Intellectual engagement can be shown, for example, with

unique arguments, insightful and concise analogies, and valid comparisons with other ideas covered in the course.)

- Presents representative, precise, and sufficient evidence from the text with citations. (Exact page numbers should be given when citing a text.)
- Shows how evidence cogently supports main claim.
- Coherent and logical organization.
- Appropriate length.

Take-home final exam: This will consist of one or more essay questions on Japanese Buddhism in general and Zen in particular. More details on its content and criteria for grading it will be provided toward the end of the term.

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 216 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890 / (412) 383-7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Class Policies

- Bring readings for the day to class.
- To be fair to those who submit their work on time, one percentage point will be deducted for each day a paper is late, with the maximum deduction being ten points per assignment. Papers ten or more days late will receive the maximum deduction of ten percentage points. Late papers will also receive fewer comments.
- Clip or staple together all multiple-page assignments.
- Submit hardcopies of assignments. Unless you have received advanced permission or have been explicitly requested to submit something by email, assignments sent by email will not be regarded as submitted and will lose points until a hardcopy is submitted. This policy is to be fair to everyone who submits hardcopies of their assignments.
- Save a digital and hardcopy of written work.
- Throughout the course, I may share in the form of handouts or overhead projections certain students' writings anonymously as good examples.
- If you email me a message (not an assignment), I will strive to answer within one business day. I usually read and respond to my email at some point between 11:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

How to Succeed in this Course

On the website for Pitt's School of Arts and Sciences, under the heading "How to Graduate in Four Years" it states the following: "A 15-credit course load translates to approximately 45 hours per week of academic activity. For every hour of in-class time, you should expect to study approximately two hours outside of class (including library, computer labs, writing, homework, and study time)." You should thus plan to do on average about six hours a week of work for this course outside of class time.

During the time you schedule to work on this course, complete the readings before the class for which they are assigned. Think about what questions they can answer and how they relate to what you have already learned in the course. Summarize the readings in your own words, noting the main subjects, facts, ideas, claims and evidence given to support claims. Take notes during class and review your notes regularly. Finish a draft of all written assignments at least one day before they are due so you will have time to revise and proofread them carefully. If you do not understand something, let me know during or after class or during my office hours. I want you to succeed in this course and am more than willing to help you.

N.B. There are additional required course readings on courseweb.

Schedule of Course Readings and Assignments

WEEK 1

M 8/26. Introduction to course

W 8/28 READING: Hori, Victor 1994. Teaching and Learning in the Rinzai Zen Monastery. *Journal of Japanese Studies* 20: 5–35. (On courseweb in "course documents")

WEEK 2

M 9/3 No Class: Labor Day.

W 9/5 READINGS:

- *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, Introduction and Chapter 1.
- Chilson, Clark 2012. "Searching for a Place to Sit: Buddhism in Modern Japan." In *Buddhism in the Modern World*, edited by David L. McMahan, pp. 49–68. London: Routledge. (On courseweb)

WEEK 3

M. 9/9 READING: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, Chapters 2 and 3.

W 9/11 READING: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, Chapter 4.

WEEK 4

M 9/16 READING: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, Chapters 5 and 6.

W 9/18 READING: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, Chapter 7.

WEEK 5

M 9/23 READING: *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, Chapter 8 and conclusion

W 9/25 READING: *The Buddha's Wish for the World*, Chapters 1 to 9

WEEK 6

M 9/30 READING: *The Buddha's Wish for the World*, Chapters 10 to 18

W 10/2 READING: *The Buddha's Wish for the World*, Chapters 19 to 27

WEEK 7

M 10/7 READING: *The Buddha's Wish for the World*, Chapters 19 to 27

W 10/9 **In-Class Midterm Exam**

WEEK 8

Tuesday (not Monday) 10/15 READING: *Bonds of the Dead*, Introduction and Chapter 1

W 10/16 READING: *Bonds of the Dead*, Chapter 2

WEEK 9

M 10/21 READING: *Bonds of the Dead*, Chapter 3

W 10/23 READING: *Bonds of the Dead*, Chapter 4

WEEK 10

M 10/28 READING: *Bonds of the Dead*, Chapter 5

Watch the film *The Funeral* outside of class. (The film is R-rated for nudity and sexual content.) It is on reserve at Stark Media Services in the Hillman library. The call number for it is V-914.

W 10/30 No Class (Instructor in Denmark)

WEEK 11

M 11/4 READING: *Bonds of the Dead*, Chapter 6 and Conclusion.

Essay questions distributed

W 11/6 READING: *The Empty Mirror*, Chapters 1 and 2.

WEEK 12

M 11/11 READING: *The Empty Mirror*, Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Essay on Japanese funeral rites due

W 11/13 READINGS:

- *The Empty Mirror*, Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

WEEK 13

M 11/18 READINGS:

- *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Chapters 1, 2.
- *The Empty Mirror*, Chapters 10 and 11.

W 11/20 READINGS:

- *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Chapters 3 and 4.

- *The Empty Mirror*, Chapters 12, 13 and 14.

WEEK 14

M. 11/25 No Class (Instructor at American Academy of Religion Conference)

W 11/27 No Class: Thanksgiving Recess

WEEK 15

M 12/2 READINGS:

- *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Chapters 5 and 6.
- *The Empty Mirror*, Chapters 15, 16, 17 and 18.

Questions for take-home final exam distributed

W 12/4 READING: *Opening the Hand of Thought*, Chapters 7 and 8.

Final Exam due by 2:00 p.m. December 10 (Tuesday). Submit a hardcopy in my mailbox located in the Religious Studies Department on the 26th floor of the Cathedral of Learning. Please do not send it as an email attachment.

N.B.: The above course schedule may change slightly if the needs of the class merit it. Changes will be announced in class and on courseweb.