

Introduction to Japanese Society and Culture

Course Description

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From the times immemorial to the present, religion has played a significant role in the life of the Japanese people and in their nation building. Religious activities from more than two thousand years ago are reflected in archaeological evidence and traditional cultural practices, and recently many New Religions have arisen in Japan and have become more and more active in foreign countries.

There has never been, however, a single organized tradition of “Japanese religion” with its own scriptures, beliefs, priests, rituals and buildings. Japanese religion, unlike Christianity and Islam, for instance, is not an individual institution. The religious heritage of the Japanese people includes several traditions, some of which are native to Japan and some of which are imported. These traditions interacted to shape a distinctive religious heritage which we may be able to call “Japanese religion” for our purposes.

This intensive course will explore such Japanese cultural and religious traditions that have had essential influences on the formation of contemporary Japan by way of tracing each strand back to its origin. This exploration will be conducted through reading the literature on the relevant topics, discussing topical issues in the classroom and viewing audio-visual materials.

Students will be expected to give oral presentations and write a short essay on one of the themes introduced during the course as well as taking the final examination.

Textbook: Earhart, H. Byron. *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982.

Evaluation: Participation	(30%)
Presentation	(10%)
Essay	(20%)
Final examination	(40%)