

JAPANESE RELIGION

Religion 4404 / 6404
University of Georgia
Fall 2003



Professor Russell Kirkland



www.uga.edu/religion/rk



Peabody Hall 221



TTH 3:30-4:00 and by appt.

"Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto."

— **WILLIAM JAMES** (1842-1910)

❖ THE PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

The academic study of religion is a systematic exploration of the visions, values, and activities by which individuals and societies of past and present have understood and shaped their life-experiences. The goal of such courses is to promote a mature sensitivity to religious traditions, personalities, issues, and institutions, within their proper historical contexts. Such courses are not intended to persuade students either toward or away from any specific tradition, nor are they intended to serve as an element of any personal spiritual search in which students might already be engaged. Rather, the goal of such courses is for students to achieve an accurate understanding of certain cultures' religions on those cultures' own terms, and to evaluate those religions in a manner that is both properly critical and properly sympathetic. Should you want an experience that is "spiritually fulfilling" to you personally, please go to a religious center of your choice and practice there. You are in this course to study religion: if you wish to learn how to practice religion, you are in the wrong place.

For Americans of the late 20th-century, much of Japanese religion may seem strange. Because of historical peculiarities in our own cultural heritage (the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and other Modern developments), most Americans tend to think of religion as an individual matter—individual choice, individual belief, individual experience. Most non-Western religions, including Japanese religion, seldom stress the individual in such ways, and rarely regard the individual as the starting point of religious realities. Moreover, Japanese religion, like other non-Western religions, seldom assumes that the basis of religion is an individual's "belief" (i.e., intellectual assent to certain propositions, like "God exists"). Rather, like most traditional religions, Japanese religion has generally been a cultural reality, in which all members of the culture participate naturally and unreflectively. In Japan—traditional and modern—being religious is generally a matter of being Japanese, and the task of students of Japanese religion is generally one of learning to understand how Japanese people understand the religious dimensions of their cultural identity.

This course will explore the many strands of religion in Japan, from earliest times to the present. We will examine the evolution of certain "basic" Japanese beliefs (such as the belief in the divinity of the emperor), learning how such beliefs sprang from specific historical realities and were reaffirmed through the centuries for specific cultural and political reasons. In the same way, we will study the arrival and domestication of Buddhism, an alien tradition that was imported to Japan from continental Asia during the 6th century. We will see that, for the Japanese, the appeal of Buddhism—like the appeal of Confucianism, a Chinese tradition—was often more its capacity for providing new cultural contributions than its capacity for rendering life more meaningful for individuals—a relatively modern development.

We will also seek to combat Westerners' common misunderstandings about Japanese religions. We will analyze, for instance, why Westerners who seek alternatives to their own religions never try to practice Shintô—Japan's indigenous religious tradition—or such consequential forms of Japanese Buddhism as Pure Land, the dominant tradition of Buddhism among both Japanese and Japanese-Americans. We will also give attention to common Western misconceptions about Zen Buddhism.

Course Objectives:

1. To illumine the hermeneutic issues involved in understanding religion across cultures. Prof. Mark MacWilliams of St. Lawrence University calls this process “gaining cross-cultural religious literacy.”
2. To introduce basic elements of the religious traditions of Japan.
3. To sample some of the cultural riches of Japan by reading important selections from classic Japanese religious literature and more modern materials.
4. To demonstrate the diverse factors that affect human life by observing the influence of historic, geographic, and economic factors on the nature and evolution of Japanese beliefs and practices.
5. To illustrate that religious traditions evolve, and that such evolution can be understood by reference to historical, intellectual, cultural and existential phenomena.
6. To stimulate meaningful comparison, and contrast, of Japanese traditions with those more familiar to students from their own cultural heritage. As Prof. Mark MacWilliams says, this means: “*To learn more about religion and about one’s self. Max Müller, a famous historian of religions, once said, “One who knows one religion knows none.” The same can be said about human life. One who knows only one culture or one way of living knows none. To know ourselves--who we are, who we could be--means we must know others. And to know others means we must study that which informs and guides their sense of self, society, and world. To study what people believe is ultimately real, good, beautiful, true, and the way they put this into practice is to study religion.*”

This syllabus is simply a general plan for the course. Changes and variations, as announced to the class by the instructor, may be necessary at times. All academic work must meet the standards contained in the document titled *A Culture of Honesty*. All students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

You are welcome to chat with the instructor after class, during office hours, or at other arranged times. The time before class, however, is not a good time for any discussion.

The classroom is not a lunchroom: please do your snacking and enjoyment of beverages before you come to class or after you leave. It is also not a phonebooth, so please make sure that any phones that you bring into the building are turned off. In sum, it is your responsibility to show respect for others by refraining from activity that might distract others or interfere with the learning process. Failure to do so will affect your course grade.



TEXTS

1. **COURSE READER** (Available at **Bel-Jean’s**, Downtown)

2. **TEXTBOOKS** (Available at local bookstores)

Required (Needed for **most** readings):

 Byron **Earhart**, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity* (4th ed., 2003)

 Byron **Earhart**, *Religion in the Japanese Experience* (2nd ed.)

 Heinrich **Dumoulin**, *Zen Enlightenment: Origins and Meaning*

Recommended (Needed for **some** readings):

 **Robinson** and **Johnson**, *The Buddhist Religion* (4th ed.)

 Daigan and Alicia **Matsunaga**, *Foundations of Japanese Buddhism* (2 vols.)

 Giei **Satô**, et al., *Unsui: A Diary of Zen Monastic Life*

Most of the required readings will be found in the Reader and in the three “required” textbooks. A certain number of required readings, however, will be found in the three “recommended” textbooks. Thus it is expected that you will acquire the first three, and that some of you will also have the latter two.

In addition, other assigned readings will be made available

(1) on reserve, in hard-copy or as “e-texts” (accessible from any computer);

(2) on the instructor’s webpage; and/or (3) as handouts.

Accessibility of Reserve readings may be affected by the library staff's efforts to recover from a fire this past July. Most of the materials intended to be used in this course were delivered to the Reserve desk well before the fire, with instructions for an "e-text" to be created for numerous readings. The listings below therefore represent the best-case scenario, and you may have to be patient, and/or adjust to unexpected changes, in regard to all Reserve readings.



REQUIREMENTS



Regular attendance



Timely completion of **all** required readings [reflected in tests and papers]



One brief essay (3-4 pages) on an assigned topic 35% of course grade



One in-class test 25% of course grade



A final essay exam 40% of course grade

At the end of the course, borderline grades are *usually* rounded up, but in *all* such cases, the instructor may take into account *all* elements of your performance, *such as* the regularity of your attendance, the consistency of your performance, and the constructiveness of your class participation. **Graduate students** will write a research paper on an approved topic, in lieu of the final exam. Students in the **Honors** Program who wish to take this course under the Honors option should submit the proper form promptly; to get Honors credit, such students will complete an essay of 7-8 pages (instead of 3-4 pages).

NOTE: The course **READER** also includes:

- ❖ "THE WRITING PROCESS AS PARTNERSHIP"
- ❖ "A GUIDE TO WRITING ACADEMIC PAPERS."

Following the advice provided there will help you write good papers in this course and other courses. See also <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~compose/student/humanities/religion.html>.



THE ACADEMIC VALUE OF THE INTERNET

Your instructor's Webpage (WWW.UGA.EDU/RELIGION/RK) includes many pertinent

- ❖ **STUDY GUIDES**
- ❖ FULL-TEXT **PUBLICATIONS**
- ❖ **LINKS** TO OTHER GOOD SITES ON ASIAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIONS.

However, like many other good sites, this one has its limitations. First, it is quite outdated. Secondly, it has never provided all the material that even your instructor would like it to provide. And thirdly, it was not constructed, in the first instance, to serve as a pedagogical tool. Even such a website tries to fulfill different functions for different people: some are intended as professional connections for other scholars, others are designed to appeal to the general public. The latter may be more colorful or amusing, but are not necessarily more reliable or more informative. Remember to *think critically about what you are seeing*: many sites have an unexpressed agenda, just like movies and TV shows, and some may be well-intentioned but lacking in academic value. **SO BEWARE attempting to use the internet as an educational tool** — *particularly* in regard to non-Western religions — **without expert guidance**. Much of what you will find there is simply garbage. Remember that all a person has to do to create, for example, a website on "Taoism" is to set up the website: he or she does not have to really *know* anything about Taoism! And for psychological and/or economic reasons, some people construct such sites just to get attention, or to get a reputation that they have not bothered to earn through hard work or proven expertise. Newcomers can easily mistake such a site for a reliable resource.

With a very few exceptions, responsible scholars do not put their research on the web. Few pro-

fessors' webpages, for instance, even provide full bibliographic data telling you what they have published. And only a handful post unpublished research findings, or provide full-text reprints of any of their publications, the way that your instructor and a few others do on their own webpages. So despite the immense amount of *stuff* that you can find on the internet, it is unreliable as an educational resource. Solid and reliable studies of non-Western religions generally appear **only** in your university **LIBRARY**, within the pages of **scholarly books and journals**. Such publications—**unlike internet websites**—undergo a careful **peer-review process**, by which today's knowledgeable authorities confirm the substance and value of good scholarship and screen out shoddy material. So **DO NOT** make the mistake of trying to "do research" on the web! Your instructor will recommend particular websites that are useful and dependable. But unless instructed otherwise, you should plan to do **all** of your research in your university **library**, informed by your instructor and guided by trained reference librarians.



COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Readings listed below in square brackets are recommended. Those not found in your assigned textbooks should (eventually) be found on Reserve.

"RELIGION" IN JAPAN

READER: "On the Academic Study of Religion in American Colleges and Universities"
[Streng, *Understanding Religious Man*, 1-10]

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 1-3 (through ¶2), 163-4

📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 214-17, 1-8, 14-17, 66-78, 137-40, 217-28

[Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*: 286-96: "Some Reflections on Foreign Scholars' Understanding of Japanese Culture and Shintô"]

SHINTÔ AND JAPANESE TRADITION

🎬 **Film:** "Shintô: Nature, Gods and Man in Japan"

Visit: <http://www.shinto.org.menu-e.html>;

<http://www.jinja.or.jp/english>; and

<http://www.kokugakuin.ca.jp.ijcc/wp/bts> ("Basic Terms of Shinto")

📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 31-39

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 9-13, 19-25, 34-38, 212-17 [206-212]

[Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*: 139-73]

[Kuroda, "Shintô in the History of Japanese Religion"]

[Breen and Teeuwen, ed., *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*]

RELIGION, MYTH, AND STATE IN ANCIENT JAPAN

Reserve: Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*: 62-68 (On the *Nihongi* and *Kojiki*)

[Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*: 258-62, 43-58]

READER: Kirkland, "The Sun and the Throne: The Origins of the Royal Descent Myth in Ancient Japan"

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 13-19

[Matsumae, "Japanese Religion: Mythic Themes," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* 7: 545-52]

JAPAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH BUDDHISM

Buddhism: The Continental Heritage

- 📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 41-42
- 📖 Robinson/Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion* (4th ed.): 1-20, 30-34, 82-86, 99-104, 170-81, 297-306, 309-10 (On the Western Study of Buddhism, the Indian Roots of Buddhism, and the Introduction of Buddhism into China)
- 📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 54-60 (Extracts from the *Lotus Sūtra*)
- Webpage: Kirkland, Review of "Choice for a Chinese Woman"

The Origins of Japanese Buddhism

- 📖 Matsunaga, vol. 1: 5-8; 📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 42-48, 50-51
- 📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 47-49, 234-36
- 📖 Matsunaga, vol. 1: 109-15, 133-37

CONFUCIANISM AND TAOISM IN JAPAN

- 📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 52-62

THE ASSIMILATION OF BUDDHISM IN JAPAN

Saichō and the Tendai School (Visit: <http://www.tendai-lotus.org/>)

- 📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 83-86, 91-94; 📖 Matsunaga, Vol. 1: 157-60 [139-49, 152-56, 160-71]
- (NB: Earhart and Kitagawa both refer to **Saichō** as "Dengyō Daishi")
- [Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 83-85]
- [Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*: 53-62]

Kūkai and the Shingon School (Visit: <http://www.shingon.org/home.html>)

- 📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 86-90 (NB: Earhart and Kitagawa refer to **Kūkai** as "Kōbō Daishi")
- Reserve: Hakeda, *Kūkai*: 61-64, 76-80 [64-76, 93-100]
- [Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*: 182-202]

TRANSITION AND REFORMATION IN MEDIEVAL JAPAN

- 📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 94-96, 115-125; 📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 60-65
- 📖 Matsunaga, Vol. 1: [250-57] 129-33, 224-225, 238-41; 📖 Matsunaga, Vol. 2: 294-95, 300-307
- Reserve: Varley, *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*: 1, 7-22, 25-27, 39-41

THE EXPANSION OF BUDDHISM IN JAPAN:

"PURE LAND" — THE BUDDHISM THAT WESTERNERS DISMISS AS "TOO 'CHRISTIAN'"

The Origins of Pure Land Buddhism

- READER: Kirkland, "Pure Land's Multi-Lineal Ancestry"
(also at <http://www.shin-ibs.edu/pdfs/pwj3-2/10RK2.pdf>.)

Reserve: Andrews, *The Teachings Essential for Rebirth*: 1-6 [20-29]
[Matsunaga, Vol. 2: 35-57]

Pure Land in Japan: The Tendai Origins

📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 98-104

Reserve: Andrews, *The Teachings Essential for Rebirth*: 31-41 [51-67, 107-20]

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 88-91 [Matsunaga, Vol. 2: 58-72]

Shinran and Shin Buddhism (Jōdo shinshū)

Visit: <http://www2.hongwanji.or.jp/english/>;
<http://www.shin-ibs.edu/library2.htm>; and
<http://www.shindharmanet.com>

A fine "Glossary of Shin Buddhist Terms" is found at <http://www.shinranworks.com/readingtools/index.htm>.
Shinran's complete works (on Reserve; 2 volumes) can also be accessed at this site.

📖 Matsunaga, Vol. 2: 85-98 [101-6] 106-11; 📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 91-94

T. Unno, "Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic": <http://www.livingdharma.org/Tannisho/TannishoContents.html>

Reserve: Taitetsu Unno, "The Nature of Religious Experience in Shin Buddhism," 252-68

Reserve: Dobbins, "Women's Birth in Pure Land: ...the Letters of Eshinni"
[Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace*: vii-ix, 27-51, 58-68, 77-88]

THE EXPANSION OF BUDDHISM IN JAPAN:

NICHIREN — THE BUDDHISM THAT WESTERNERS DISDAIN (...or Embrace)

Visit: <http://www.nst.org>;
<http://www.nichirenshu.org>;
<http://www.sgi.usa.org/buddhism/library>

A fine "Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts" is found at the last site.

📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 104-6; 📖 Matsunaga, Vol. 2: 137-40 [140-56] 156-59, 165-69

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 91-97, 275-78

THE EXPANSION OF BUDDHISM IN JAPAN:

ZEN — THE BUDDHISM THAT WESTERNERS (USED TO) REGARD AS "COOL"

Visit: <http://iriz.hanazono.ac.jp> (English);
<http://sotozen-net.or.jp> (English);
<http://www.ciolet.com/WWWVL-Zen.html>

The Chinese Origins of Zen

📖 Dumoulin: 25-34 [35-72]; [Kraft, *Zen: Tradition and Transition*: 125-39, 105-24]

The Evolution of the Zens of Japan: Rinzai and Sōtō

📖 Dumoulin: 77-82; [Kraft, *Zen: Tradition and Transition*: 140-56]

📖 Matsunaga, Vol. 2: 204-8, 211-215, 218-19 [233-55]; Dumoulin: 88-124

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 99-102

Living Real Zen: Life in the Zen Monastery

Reserve: Kraft, *Zen: Tradition and Transition*: 157-77 [13-87]

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 76-80 (On Soto Zen Nuns in Modern Japan)

📖 Satō, *Unsu*: 1-99

🎬 **Film**: "The Land of the Disappearing Buddha"

Zen and the Arts

📖 Dumoulin, *Zen Enlightenment*: 82-84; 📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 230-33, 176-79

RELIGION IN MODERN JAPAN

Christianity, Bushidō, and Neo-Confucianism

📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 128-35, 144-54

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 141-44, 162-63 [144-50] (On Christianity in Japan)

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 104-9, 115 middle ¶ (On “Neo-Confucianism” in Japan)
[Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*: 131-67]

Nationalism and Religion in Modern Japan

📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 154-57, 161-76, 189-92

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 236-42 [38-42] 43-44

[Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*: 199-225, 248-61]

🎬 **Film: "The Funeral of Emperor Hirohito"**

The "New Religions" and Religion in Japan Today

📖 Earhart, *Japanese Religion*: 168-82, 188-89

📖 Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience*: 268-74 [283-90]

Forgotten Whispers . . .

Kitagawa, "Pilgrimage to the Sacred Mountain" ([handout](#))

Reserve: Miyake, "Mountain Austerities in Shugendō" (extracts, to be assigned)

🎬 **Film: "Journey to a Lost Japan"**

ADDITIONAL VIDEOS AND OTHER EVENTS

Circumstances may provide opportunities for one or more guest speakers to appear in class, and/or for the following videos to be shown:

🎬 **"Japan — The Electronic Tribe"** chronicles the historical and cultural forces that have shaped the Japanese temperament. (From a 1987 PBS series, hosted by Jane Seymour.)

🎬 **"Zen Temple: The Eiheiji"**

The young novice priests of Eiheiji monastery learn that simplicity is a virtue in every aspect of life. This film is the first documentation of daily life — including meditation, ceremonies, chores, and meals — at Eiheiji, one of the two main Soto Zen monasteries in Japan.

Be sure to visit www.zendo.com/eiheiji.html.