

Religion and Popular Culture in Contemporary Japan
SCAR 2TT3 – Term I, 2020/21
Online

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Description

This course provides an introduction to the study of Japanese popular culture and religions. Our historical scope (“time of the gods” to the present), our source materials (archaeology to text to multi-media) and our questions will encourage a comprehensive understanding of contemporary Japan. This is a thematic course. Each week we will take a particular theme such as “marathon monks”, “Godzilla”, or “Christianity” and examine particular manifestations of that theme in different historical periods and cultural spaces. This thematic approach has the benefit of allowing us to cover a wide variety of materials in a short period of time, but there is an inherent danger. Without the linear structure and comfort of a historical narrative, students often have difficulty contextualizing things and figuring out what they are supposed to know. It is essential that you keep up with the readings, learn the details, and study the general historical periods. You will need to know, for example, that Kūkai came before Tezuka Osamu, Heian before Edo, and that Nichiren was the famous 13th century Buddhist priest who founded the religion that still bears his name. Master your history.

A second potential pitfall in a thematic course is the tendency to essentialize material and draw ahistorical connections. For example, in our week on visual culture some of you will be tempted to see contemporary Japanese comic books (*manga*) as an inevitable outgrowth of 17th century woodblock prints (*ukiyo*e). They are not. *Manga* are a modern phenomenon that grew out of the political radicalism of the 1960s. Connecting *manga* to *ukiyo*e is an ideological move, not a historical one. You will learn the difference.

Most of the class will consist of pre-recorded lectures posted on Avenue, though we will have a few live classes on Zoom between 7-9pm on Tuesdays. There will be no official tutorial, but I will be available on Tuesdays from 7-8pm on Zoom for questions and discussion.

Course Requirements

Weekly Written Assignments: 70% (7% x 10 assignments)

- Each week you will be asked to write 1-2 paragraphs on a given project or theme. Many of the weeks will offer a non-written option.
- Each assignments will be reviewed by two other students, who will provide feedback (see below).
- You will be graded on content and completion.
- **All assignments will be submitted online by Sunday at midnight of the week they are assigned.**
- Late assignments will be penalized one point (one percentage point of total grade) per day.

Reviewing other student assignments: 30% (3% x 10 weeks)

- Students will comment on two other assignments each week.
- You will be graded on content and completion.
- **All reviews must be posted by Wednesday at midnight (three days after the assignments are posted).**
- Late responses will be penalized one point (one percentage point of total grade) per day.

NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO FINAL EXAM FOR THIS COURSE.

Required Readings

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE - CHECK COURSE PAGE REGULARLY)

1. Weekly readings will be made available on Avenue or through other online sources.
2. We will be making extensive use of online sources. These are REQUIRED READINGS. You should download them, print them out, and read them like your other readings.
3. Note: Readings should be completed by Monday of the week in which they are listed.

Course Outline

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE - CHECK COURSE PAGE REGULARLY)

Week One: Framing the Course

- September 10: Japan – Overview of Course
- Overview lecture
- Japanese pronunciation lecture

Assignment for next week.

- Must be posted by midnight on Sunday, September 13th.
- Two options: 1) Tell the story of how your parents met. Include something about how it easily could have gone the other way (i.e. how their meeting was total chance). 2) Tell us about any famous(ish) relatives/ancestors in your family. For example, my Grandfather helped come up with the idea of putting toys in cereal boxes.
- Responses to this assignment must be posted by midnight on Wednesday, September 16th.

Week Two: Myriad gods

- September 17: Introducing Japan; Kami and the genealogy of a nation
- Lecture : The genealogy of state identity
- Lecture: Kojiki

Assignment for next week

- Option 1) Find a *kami* in pop culture/music/game – write a one- or two-page overview/introduction of the *kami*. Option 2) Create a new amulet for a specific kind of protection or this-worldly-benefit. You can do this entirely as an image (with a brief explanation) or you can simply describe it in one or two paragraphs.

Readings

- Reader, “Turning to the Gods in Times of Trouble” (Avenue)
- Kojiki (Avenue)

Week Three: Buddhism comes to Japan

- September 24: State protection and personal protection; What sutras want.
- Lecture – Buddhism and State Protection
- Lecture – What sutras want
- Lecture – Early Japanese History

Assignment for next week

- Write a sutra connected to the amulet or kami from last week. Include language of benefits, but also incentives to spread the sutra.

Readings

- **Golden light Sutra (Avenue)**
- **Lotus sutra (Avenue)**

Week Four: Telling Stories 1

- October 1: Pure Land Buddhism
- Lecture Medieval Japan and End Times
- Death Bed Salvation
- Lecture: Birth in the Pure Land

Assignment for next week

- Produce a Death Bed Image

Readings

- Deal, "Women and Japanese Buddhism" (Avenue)
- Pure Land Sutras (Avenue)
- Death Bed Images (Avenue)

Week Five: Telling Stories 2

- October 8: Samurai Stories and Christian Stories
- Lecture: Tale of Heike
- Lecture: End of Heian period
- Lecture Christian Century

Assignment for next week

- Following the examples in our course readings this week, write your own samurai vignette of one or two paragraphs.

Readings

- Sources of Japanese Tradition "The Way of the Warrior" (Avenue)
- Endō Shūsaku, "The Final Martyrs" (Avenue)
- Video – Miminashi Hoichi (Avenue)

READING WEEK – No Classes

Week Seven: Manga

- October 22: Manga
- Lecture: *Manga*

Assignment for next week

- Write two paragraphs on your favourite *manga* or create some panels of your own *manga*.

Readings:

- Thomas, “Shūkyōō Asobi and Miyazaki Hayao’s Anime. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (February 2007), pp. 73-95. Available online through JSTOR via the library.
- Additional Reading TBD. (Avenue)

Week Eight: Embodied Culture and Bathing

- October 29: Ode to the Nod; Bathing
- Lecture: The language of *ki* 気
- Lecture: The bath

Assignment for next week

- What broader statements can you make about Canadian (or another) culture by how it bathes? Examples? One or two paragraphs.

Readings

- Bathing in Japan (Online)
- Youtube (links in Avenue)

Week Nine: Transgression, Taboo, and Discrimination

- November 5: Transgression, Pilgrimage, and discrimination in Japan

- Lecture Tokugawa period
- Lecture: Shikoku pilgrimage and transgression
- Lecture: *Buraku* and Discrimination in bodies

Assignment for next week

- Two choices: 1) find an example of embodied discrimination and write two paragraphs about it, or 2) create a pilgrimage

Readings

- Reader, “Legends, Miracles and Faith in Kobo Daishi” (Avenue)
- Hane, “The Outcaste in Japan” (Avenue)
- Video by *Buraku Liberation Group* (Avenue)
- Grandmother’s Hands (Avenue)

Week Ten: Marathon Monks

- November 12: Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei
- Film: Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei (Avenue)

Assignment for next week

- Turn any sporting event into a religious training practice. Five hundred words.

Readings

- Stevens, “The Path of the Spiritual Athlete” (Avenue)

Week 11: Atomic Bombing to Godzilla

- November 19: The Atomic Bomb and Godzilla
- Lecture: Atomic Bombing of Japan
- Lecture: Godzilla

Assignment for next week

- If you were to make a museum exhibit about the covid crisis, what three items would you have to include? 500 words.

Readings

- Allison, “Millennial Monsters” (Avenue)
- Yano, “Panic Attacks” (Avenue)
- This Precious Life (Avenue)
- Allison on Precarity (Avenue)

Week Twelve – Buddhism in Japan Today

- November 26: Buddhist Priests in Japan Today
- Lecture: Buddhism and death
- Lecture: Priests today

Assignment for next week

- Write a short piece about someone you know. Try to capture their essence. 500 words.

Readings

- Rowe, “Charting Known Territory” (Avenue)
- Rowe, “Temple Buddhism on the Road” (Avenue)

Last Class

- December 3: weddings
- Lecture: The Chapel Wedding

Readings

- Fisch, “The Rise of the Chapel Wedding in Japan”
Japanese Journal of Religious Studies – you should know by now.

Final Exam: Nope.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-

MARK	GRADE
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Your Responsibilities:

You are responsible for all material on this syllabus and for making up missed lectures and assignments. Course content and scheduling may change, all notifications will be made on the course web page and, when possible, in lecture and tutorial. Students are responsible for regularly checking the course web page.

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

The course website can be found on Avenue to Learn.

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

You are also responsible for bringing concerns about grading to the attention of your TA and myself in a timely manner. This means that if you have questions about your grade on a particular assignment or test, you must let us know within two weeks of the official posting of that grade. Your concerns must be specific. Please do not come to us with: "I think I deserve a better grade," or "I worked really hard." Please also be aware that if you ask me to double check your grade on an assignment, there is just as much chance that your grade will go down as up.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

If you are ever in a situation where you are not sure if what you are submitting constitutes plagiarism, contact me immediately.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work

[McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work".

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.