CIEE Tokyo, Japan

Course name: Religion in Japan  
Course number: RELI 2003 TOJA  
Programs offering course: Tokyo Japanese Studies  
Language of instruction: English  
U.S. Semester Credits: 3  
Contact Hours: 45  
Term: Summer 2019

Course Description
This course will provide students with a fundamental understanding of the most prominent religions in Japanese culture and society: Shinto and Buddhism. In addition, students will also learn about the so-called “New Religions,” Christianity as well as other world religions found in the global city of Tokyo.

Learning Objectives
In this course, students will develop a more in depth understanding of the prominent religions being practiced today. By the end of this course students will:
- Be familiar with different religions in Japan.
- Understand Japanese religious traditions and customs.
- Understand Japanese religious behaviors.

Course Prerequisites
None

Methods of Instruction
This course will incorporate in-class lectures, discussion, readings, video and fieldtrips.

Assessment and Final Grade
- Class Participation 20%  
- Response Paper (2x) 20%  
- Final Paper 20%  
- Group Presentation 20%  
- Final Exam 20%

Course Requirements
Class Participation
You are expected to follow CIEE’s attendance and participation policies as outlined in the CIEE Academic Manual for students.

Final Paper
Students must write a Final Paper on a topic of their choice, subject to instructor approval. The paper must be at least 2,000 words and use both in-class and out-of-class scholarly materials.

Presentation
Students will present on a topic of their choice, subject to instructor approval.

Final Exam
Closed books exam covering topics covered throughout the class.

Weekly Schedule
Note: The following schedule and assignments are subject to change.

Week 1
Session 1.1  Introduction to the Class

Week 2
Session 2.1  Academic Study of Religion
Topic: Theoretical Approaches to Studying Religion
Content: Overview of Durkheim, Marx, Eliade and Geertz

Session 2.2  Introduction to Japanese Religiosities
Topic: Common Themes Found in Japanese Religions
Content: Importance Placed on Family, Rituals, and Festivals
Readings: Religion in Japan (pp. 1-17)

Session 2.3  Fieldtrip: Temple or Shrine

Session 2.4  Shintō
Topic: Mythology and Deities
Content: Meaning of Kami and Foundational Myths
Readings: Reader, Ian (pp. 16-63)
Assignment: Response Paper 1

Week 3
Session 3.1  Shintō
Topic: Festivals, Rituals and Customs
Content: Ritual Calendar/ Life-Cycle Rituals
Session 3.2  Shintō
Topic: Shintō and Popular Culture: Exploring the Cinema of Hayao Miyazaki
Content: Religious Themes in Spirited Away
Readings: “Shinto Perspectives in Miyazake’s Anime Film ‘Spirited Away’”

Session 3.3  Buddhism
Topic: Basic Tenets
Content: Life of the Historical Buddha; Four Noble Truths
Readings: An Introduction to Buddhism (pp. 8-31)

Week 4
Session 4.1  Buddhism
Topic: Early History of Buddhism in Japan
Content: Nara Schools
Readings: Religion in Japan (pp. 46-68)

Session 4.2  Buddhism
Topic: Heian Buddhism (Mahayana and Vajrayana Traditions)
Content: Tendai and Shingon
Readings: Religion in Japan (pp. 97-110)

Session 4.3  Buddhism
Topic: Kamakura Buddhism
Content: Nichiren, Pure Land, and Zen
Readings: Religion in Japan (pp. 128-144)
Assignment: Response Paper 2

Week 5
Session 5.1  Christianity
Topic: The “Christian Century”
Content: Francis Xavier; Danka System; Kakure Kirishitan
Readings: “The Kakure Kirishitan and Their Place in Japan’s Religious Tradition”

Session 5.2  Group Presentations

Session 5.3  Religion and Nationalism
Topic: Meiji Period Religion
Content: State Shinto and “Imperial Way” Buddhism
Readings: Reader, Ian (pp. 122-129)
    “Reconsidering Zen, Samurai, and the Martial Arts”

Week 6
Session 6.1  
Japanese New Religions  
Topic: Introduction to the “New” Religions  
Content: Aum Shinrikyo and Soka Gakkai  
Readings: “The Evolution of Aum Shinrikyo as a Religious Movement”

Session 6.2  
Religion in a Global City  
Topic: Migration and Multiculturalism Religious Communities  
Content: Islam and Christianity in Tokyo  
Readings: TBA

Session 6.3  
Final Exam

Course Materials
Readings


