

The Religion of Anime

M: Lecture (ANNS 110) W: Film Screening & Discussion (LEVN AUD) F: Recitation (Room Varies)

Learning Outcomes

The purpose of a liberal arts education is not merely the accumulation of factual information. You will leave this course with new knowledge about Japanese religion, culture, and history, but its primary objectives are to build and enhance the transferable skills of critical reading, sophisticated media analysis, spirited yet civil discussion, and meticulous analytical writing.

Weekly Tasks:

- 1) Attend Monday lecture 5:15-6:15.
- 2) Attend Wednesday film screening and discussion, 5:15-8:15 (bring snacks if you need an energy boost).
- 3) Complete assigned readings and post to the discussion board at least 12 hours before recitation (i.e., the night before).
- 4) Attend recitation on Friday.

Overview of the Course

Shrine maidens. Buddhist wizards. Poltergeists and possessions. Gods and demons. The popular Japanese illustrated media of manga and anime are filled with religious characters and ideas, but what does it all mean? This course uses popular illustrated media such as manga and anime, as well as live-action film, as tools for investigating how media and religion have been deeply intertwined in Japan, both historically and today. It also uses some key terms in religious studies to reveal fascinating connections between fan cultures, media, and ritual practice.

Assignments at a Glance

- 2 response papers of 500-1000 words each
- 1 midterm media activity: 15-second storyboard
- 1 final media activity: mini-lecture of 10 slides/1500 words
- 14 pop quizzes in lecture
- 13 discussion board posts
- 13 participation points in recitation

Satisfies *Cross-Cultural Analysis* and *Arts & Letters* requirements.

Books to Buy (Print is preferable to ebook, but either is OK)

- URASAWA Naoki, *20th Century Boys* Perfect Edition (manga), vol. 1
- IOKA Waco, *Kakuriyo: Bed & Breakfast for Spirits* (manga), vol. 1

Video Syllabus

See an overview by scanning at right or clicking below:
<https://youtu.be/bYgRbpl33f0>



Participation

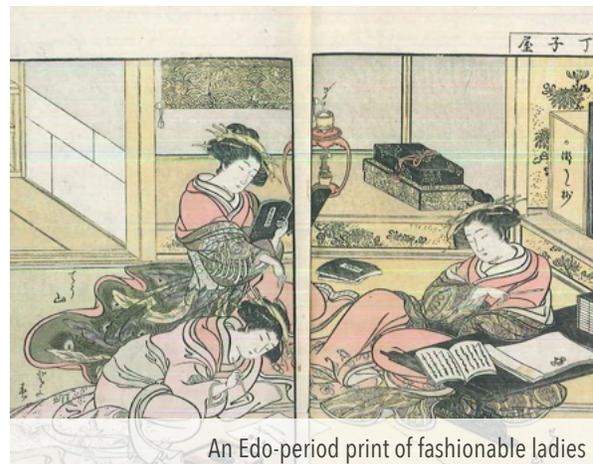
Attendance is required at every lecture and recitation.

Your participation grade is scored as follows:

- 14 in-lecture quizzes (1 point per quiz)
- 13 recitations (1 point for participation in discussion)
- 13 discussion board posts (1 point per post)

The remainder of your grade is based on four assignments, each worth 15 points.

Quizzes may happen on Monday or Wednesday; they may happen before or after the film screening on Wednesday.



An Edo-period print of fashionable ladies

Expectations

- Attend lectures and be fully present. Arrive on time!
- Keep up with the readings; finish before Friday recitation.
- Attend recitation; participate in discussion actively.
- Demonstrate awareness of your own biases and healthy suspicion regarding stakeholders' truth claims, both in your writing and in your contributions to class discussion.

Discussion Board Posts

Beginning in Week 2, you should post a question or comment to the designated discussion board for your recitation by midnight on Thursday (i.e., roughly 12 hours before recitation starts).

I provide a general question to spur your thinking, but the question is a point of departure, not a simple request for a mechanical answer. It's an invitation for you to draw connections between the lectures, the assigned readings, and the film.

Your discussion post may take the form of a question or comment, but in either case it should cite or refer to a specific passage in the readings or a specific scene from the assigned films (include authors and page numbers).

If you are asking a question, it should not just be a matter of opinion ("Did you all like the movie?"), nor should it be a simple yes/no question. Rather, it should be a point of interpretation (trying to figure out the meaning of a confusing passage, for example) or perhaps a point of comparison (picking out two passages or scenes and highlighting an apparent continuity or discontinuity between them).

You are welcome to respond to somebody else's post to satisfy this assignment, but please make sure that your response addresses the person's question substantively or takes the conversation in a new direction.

In past years, many students have found it helpful and exciting to compare themes across weeks as well.

Discussion board posts are graded like other academic assignments, and the rules of academic honesty apply. *Citations of readings must be accurate; you may not use generative AI to write your posts, nor may you simply copy-paste content from lecture slides.*

Workload

Lectures feature analysis of specific clips, historical background, and introductions to terms. Periodically, I will pause and give you time to reflect on an open-ended question, either by yourself or in conversation with those around you. Some of these reflection periods will be weekly quizzes worth one point each.

Reading amounts to ~50 pages of academic text/week.

The readings, lecture, and film are designed to reinforce and complement each other, but the connections may not always be immediately obvious. Your job in the weekly discussion board posts is to figure out how they "fit."

In recitation, your TA will lead a discussion about these connections while also preparing you for assignments.

It is very easy to do well this course as long as you apply steady effort, but an "A" is not guaranteed. You must keep up with the readings, attend lectures, regularly post to the discussion board, and attend recitation. If you do those things, the assignments should be straightforward.



Professional cosplayer Enako surrounded by snap-happy fans
(photo courtesy of @7yu_mt)

You Have Four Assignments:

- The first (a paper) asks you to think about the problems of applying the category “religion” to a country with low levels of institutional affiliation but high rates of ritual participation.
- The second (a media activity) invites you to apply what you’ve learned about techniques used to make manga, anime, and film by having you reproduce a scene via the Storyboarder application or other software of your choice.
- The third (a paper) asks you to think about how Japanese media have represented religious ideas—and how religious institutions have deployed media to promote their messages—across Japan’s long history.
- The fourth (a media activity) asks you to “think like the teacher” by synthesizing the analytical skills and conceptual themes of the course in a mini-lecture (a slideshow with embedded images, video, and an analytical argument).

Papers should be written in 12-point font with one-inch margins; they must cite relevant assigned readings using a consistent citation style. A grading rubric for each assignment (including media assignments) is available on Canvas.

Please seek help from your TA or the [Writing Center](#) if you are having trouble starting or finishing these assignments.

Grading Scheme (100 Points Total)

Recitation Attendance and Participation	(1 point per session)	13%
Discussion Board Posts	(1 point per post)	13%
In-class Quizzes	(1 per week; 1 point per quiz)	14%
Response Paper #1		15%
Media Activity #1: Storyboard Assignment		15%
Response Paper #2		15%
Media Activity #2: Mini-lecture/Slideshow		15%



A votive tablet (*ema*) featuring Sailor Mars at Hikawa Shrine in Tokyo. The shrine in *Sailor Moon* is modeled on this shrine. Photo by Prof. Thomas, 2010.

Extension Policy

We expect you to make deadlines, but we will readily grant extensions (usually no more than 3 days) if it means that you can do your best work. You just need to ask.

In order to receive an extension, you must contact your TA ahead of time with a concrete, reasonable proposal for when you will turn the work in. Work that is submitted late without prior communication will automatically lose points.

Academic Honesty

Academic writing is a particular type of disciplined thinking. It requires you to marshal evidence in support of a thesis, to organize your ideas so that others can easily follow them, and to anticipate and respond to potential objections.

These skills are foundational to the college experience. When people hire college graduates, they expect them to be able to present complicated concepts in clear, persuasive prose. They also expect them to be able to generate and defend original ideas. It is therefore in your interest to embrace writing assignments as key opportunities to practice this valuable skill.

- *Plagiarism (copying someone else’s work) or asking someone else to do your work for you is prohibited.*
- *Using AI text generators (such as ChatGPT) to produce text counts as plagiarism by the standards of this course.*
- *“Spinning” existing text by running it through translation or thesaurus software also counts as plagiarism.*
- *Fabricating false citations also counts as academic dishonesty.*

Instances of academic dishonesty will result in failure on the assignment and appropriate disciplinary action.

Drop-in Hours

I hold drop-in hours according to the schedule in the header above. You can schedule an appointment by sending me an email, or you can just drop by. Priority goes to those with appointments.

This Course is Rated "R"

I provide content warnings (CW) for some course content, but I cannot anticipate everything that will be uncomfortable for you. Please approach all material as if it has an "R" rating—you can expect explicit sex and violence, including scenes of sexual assault. If this will bother you, please take another course.

Communication

As practice for the post-baccalaureate professional world, your e-mail communication with the professor and teaching assistants should be formal. You are expected to use a formal salutation ("Dear" works well), identify yourself ("My name is X and I am in RELS 0790"), and write clearly and politely about what it is you need ("I am afraid that I am going to miss recitation on Friday because I am ill").

Teaching Assistants

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This postcard by illustrator Fukiya Kōji (1898-1979) was included in a New Year's issue of the popular girls' magazine *Shōjo Club* sometime during the Fifteen Years' War (1931-45). It depicts visits to shrines as a pleasurable leisure activity.

Detail, Chōjūgiga



Grade Grubbing

Don't do it. I will only entertain concerns about fairness in the very exceptional cases where there seems to be a major inconsistency. The TAs and I meet regularly to discuss grading practices and to ensure consistency across discussion sections. Needless needling me or your TA about a grade may very well work against you.

That said, honest mistakes can happen. If you catch a calculation error, I promise to fix it immediately.



A traveling kamishibai performer entertains children.