

The Religion of Anime

Monday: Lecture

Wednesday: Lecture and Film Screening

Friday: Recitation

Learning Outcomes

The purpose of a liberal arts education is not merely the accumulation of facts. You will leave this course with more general knowledge about Japanese religion and Japanese popular culture, but its primary objectives are to facilitate opportunities to engage in the transferable skills of critical reading, spirited yet civil discussion, and meticulous analytical writing.

Weekly Tasks:

- 1) Do the readings. Take notes.
- 2) Attend Monday lecture 5:15–6:15
- 3) Attend Wednesday lecture and film screening, 5:15–8:15 (bring snacks if you need an energy boost)
- 4) Post to the discussion board at least 24 hours before recitation.
- 5) 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 replete with religious characters and spiritual ideas. 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.

This course satisfies **Cross-Cultural Analysis** and the **Arts & Letters** requirement.

Assignments:

- 3 response papers, 500–1000 words each
- 10 discussion board posts
- Regular attendance at recitation

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
 - NAKAMURA Hikaru, *Saint Young Men* (manga), vol. 1
- All other readings available in PDF on Canvas.

Attendance

Attendance and participation (including online) will count for 40% of your grade. Writing assignments reward those who attend recitations regularly.

You may miss three recitation sessions without penalty, no questions asked. However, if you know you will be absent due to illness or travel, please be courteous enough to email your TA ahead of time.



An Edo-period print of fashionable ladies

Expectations

- Attend lectures and be fully present.
- Attend recitation regularly; 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 and continuing through the semester, you should post a question or comment to the designated discussion board for your recitation, preferably 24 hours before the Friday meeting.

Your question or comment should cite or refer to a specific passage in the readings or a specific scene from the assigned films. Ideally, your post should not just be a request for factual information or a simple yes or no question, but rather 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.

You must post at least 10 times over the course of the semester. In our 14-week semester this schedule gives you the flexibility to skip a post now and then.

Workload

The course is designed so that the readings and lecture reinforce and complement each other. You need information from both to write the papers.

Each week you will have approximately 50–75 pages of academic reading. In some weeks you will read one or more volumes of manga instead of watching a film.

Lectures feature discussions of specific clips, historical background, introductions to technical terminology, and so forth. Periodically, I will stop the lecture and give you time to reflect on an open-ended question. It will help to come to class with a notepad and writing utensil handy for jotting down your thoughts.

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, watch the lectures, regularly post to the discussion board, and attend recitation. If you do those things, responding to the paper prompts should be fairly straightforward.



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

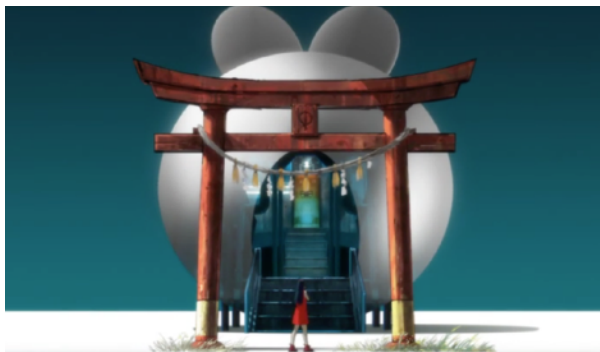
Written Assignments

You will have **three response papers** of no fewer than 500 and no more than 1000 words each. Each is worth 20% of your grade. The first of these asks you to describe the compositional techniques and industrial trends that structure the creation of manga, anime, and film. The second asks you to think about how Japanese popular media have represented religious ideas and institutions, focusing in particular on the historical process of change over time. The third asks you to synthesize the themes of the course with reference to some of the religious studies keywords and sociological trends we discuss in the last few weeks.

All papers should be written in 12-point font with one-inch margins. Submit them through the designated course dropbox. You can use any widely accepted, consistent method of citation, but if in doubt please follow the Chicago Manual of Style. A sample grading rubric for each of the papers is available on Canvas. Please seek help from the Writing Center if you are having trouble starting or finishing these assignments.

Grading Scheme (100 Points Total)

Recitation Attendance and Participation	(2 points per session)	20%
Discussion Board Posts	(2 points per post; 10 posts total)	20%
Response Paper #1		20%
Response Paper #2		20%
Response Paper #3		20%
Extra credit given for attending Japan-related talks. Details in class.		



Morimoto Kōji, dir. "Opening," from the Ōtomo Katsuhiro film *Short Peace*

Academic Honesty

If you plagiarize someone else's work or if it is evident that you have arranged for someone else to do your work for you, you will fail the assignment and possibly the course. *There are no exceptions to this rule.* If you are struggling to finish an assignment on time, talk with your TF about getting an extension before you gamble with your future by cheating. It's not worth it, especially because we happily grant extensions (within reason) so that you can do your best work.



Hyakki yakō engi emaki, detail

Drop-in Hours

I hold drop-in hours twice a week. You can schedule an appointment through the scheduler on Canvas (include a note letting me know what you want to discuss), or you can just drop by. Priority goes to those with appointments.

(Dis)comfort

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

Communication

As practice for the post-baccalaureate professional world, your e-mail communication with us 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

TBA



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.



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 in grading practices. The TAs and I meet regularly to discuss grading practices, guidelines, and expectations to ensure consistency across discussion sections. Needlessly needling me or your TA about a grade may very well work against you.

That said, if you catch a real calculation error, I promise to fix it immediately.



A traveling kamishibai performer entertains children.

COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a draft. Course readings and schedule subject to minor changes.

Part I: A Medium Theory of Religion

The orienting questions of this part of the course focus on how people make both religion and media. We will be asking *who* makes *religion* and *why* and *who* makes *media* and *how*.

Week 1: Introduction to the Course // Anti-Essentialism is Key

Wednesday (31 August)

- ❖ Read: Thomas, "Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan," 3–6.
- ▶ Watch: ŌTOMO Katsuhiro, supervising dir. *Short Peace* (2013; 68 minutes) CW: Violence and implied sexual assault.

Week 2: The Academic Study of Religion // Questioning Clichés

Wednesday (7 September)

- ❖ Read: Stoddard and Martin, "Introduction" to *Stereotyping Religion*, 1–10
- ❖ Read: McCloud, "Religions are Belief Systems," 11–22
- ❖ Read: Smith, "Religion Concerns the Transcendent," 55–68.
- ▶ Watch (at home): "Editing Space and Time: Satoshi Kon" (Every Frame a Painting YT Channel; 7:36)
- ▶ Watch: KON Satoshi, dir. *Paprika* (2006; 90 minutes) CW: psychological manipulation, abduction, physical harassment
- Discuss: What are some basic rules we might follow for talking descriptively about religion without speaking normatively or prescriptively about what counts as "good" religion?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 筒井康隆、『パプリカ』、9–35頁

Week 3: Japanese Religion // Non-Exclusive, Situational, Playful

Monday (12 September)

- ❖ Read: Reader and Tanabe, *Practically Religious*, 1–32
- ❖ Read: Thomas, "Tongue in Cheek, Just in Case."

Wednesday (14 September)

- ❖ Read: Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 1–34.
- ▶ Watch: SHINKAI Makoto, dir. *Your Name*. (2016)
- Discuss: How can we define religion in a way that reconciles the statistical discrepancies between professions of belief and ritual practice in Japan?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 武井裕之、『仏ゾーン』第一巻, 5–56頁

Week 4: Cinema // Perspective, Editing, Movement, and Focus

Monday (19 September)

- ❖ Read: Plate, *Religion and Film* [new edition], ix-xvi; 1–15
- ❖ Read: Last, "A Style-Sensitive Approach to Religion and Film," 545–552 only
- ❖ Read: Hamner, "Religion and Film: A Pedagogical Rubric," 1139–44 only
- ▶ Watch at home: "Akira Kurosawa: Composing Movement," (Every Frame a Painting YouTube Channel; 8:24)

Wednesday (21 September)

- ❖ Read: Yi, "Storytelling in the Rashōmon Gate," 1–9
- ▶ Watch in class: KUROSAWA Akira, *Rashōmon* CW: Sexual assault
- ◎ Discuss: What can cinema do that other forms of storytelling cannot?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 宮崎駿、『風の谷のナウシカ』、第一巻、9–26頁

Week 5: Manga // Framing Devices and Compositional Techniques

Monday (26 September)

- ❖ Read: Natsume, "The Functions of Panels in Manga"
- ❖ Read: Takahashi, "Opening the Closed World of Shōjo Manga," 114–36
- ❖ Read: Berndt, "Considering Manga Discourse," 295–310

Wednesday (28 September)

- ❖ In-class *manga kissaten!* Read: URASAWA Naoki, *20th Century Boys*, Perfect Edition, vol. 1, chs. 1–3 only
- ❖ In-class *manga kissaten!* Read: IOKA Waco, *Kakuriyo Bed & Breakfast for Spirits*, vol. 1 (all)
- ◎ Discuss: What stylistic differences do you see between the manga for this week?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 小池圭一『ウルトラヘヴン』 vol. 1, 第一巻、5–20頁
- ✓ Extra credit: Attend one panel on a Japanese topic at the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Association for Asian Studies Conference, held at Penn on October 1–2. Write a short synopsis of something you learned (no more than 300 words).

Part II: Drawing on Tradition

This part of the course investigates change over time. We examine how Japanese people have used various media forms to share ideas about cosmology, morality, security, and collective memory.

Week 7: Karmic Cosmology (Ancient and Medieval Japan) // Time and Space

Monday (11 October)

- ❖ Read: Keene, trans. "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter," 168–184
- ❖ Read: Kimbrough, trans. "The Tale of the Fuji Cave," 1–22 (CW: torture)
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 手塚治虫、『火の鳥』『羽衣編』

Wednesday (13 October)

- ❖ Read: Reider, trans. *Tsukumogami-ki*
- ▶ Watch: TAKAHATA Isao, dir. *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (2013, 137 mins.)
- ◎ Discuss: What **moral** and **explanatory** functions did picture scrolls play in ancient and medieval Japan?

Week 8: Security (Early Modern Japan) // Morality and Social (Dis)Order

Monday (17 October)

- ❖ Read: Kate Wildman Nakai, Fumiko Miyazaki, and Mark Teeuwen, trans. *Christian Sorcerers on Trial*, xv–xxviii; 241–67

Wednesday (19 October)

- ❖ Read: Miura, "The Buddha in Yoshiwara," 1–30 (CW: poop and sexy times);
- ❖ Smits, "Shaking Up Japan," 1045–78
- ▶ Watch: Nakamura Kenji, dir. *Mononoke*, eps. 1–5 (2007, approximately 2 hours)
- ◎ Discuss: What can we learn about Tokugawa-period religion from this week's anime and readings?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 井上雄彦、『バガボンド』第一巻、1–2章

Week 9: Propaganda (Modern Japan) // National Apotheosis

Monday (24 October)

- ❖ Read: Orbaugh, "Kamishibai and the Art of the Interval," 78–100

Wednesday (26 October)

- ❖ Read: Hori, "The Dream of Japanese National Animation," 155–203

- ▶ Watch: KATABUCHI Sunao, dir. *In This Corner of the World* (2017, 128 minutes)
- ◎ Discuss: What made the media of imperial Japan seem “religious” to outsiders?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 中沢啓治、『はだしのゲン』 PAGES TBD

Week 10: Nostalgia and Critique (Postwar Japan) // Spiritual, But Not Religious?

Monday (31 October)

- ❖ Read: MacWilliams, “Revisioning Japanese Religiosity,” 177–189 only
- ❖ Read: Ma, “Three Views of the Rising Sun, Obliquely,” 183–96

Wednesday (2 November)

- ❖ Read: Suter, “Resurrection as Zombie Revolution,” 108–37
- ❖ Read: Ortabasi, “(Re)animating Folklore,” 254–75
- ▶ TAKAHATA Isao, dir. *Pom Poko*
- ◎ Discuss: In the post-defeat period (roughly, 1945–1989) Japanese people had conflicted relationships with the past. How did they celebrate the past, and how did they critique it?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 手塚治虫、『火の鳥』 vol. 1 「黎明編」, 91–117頁

RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE ON 11/11

The response paper prompt for Part 2 of the course will be available to students who formally enroll.



Aum Shinrikyō Founder Asahara Shōkō Appeals to Potential Followers

Part III: Synthesis

In the final part of the course, we pair classic terminology from religious studies with some anime, manga, and live-action films that exemplify some anxieties characteristic of recessionary (1991-present) Japanese society.

Week 11: Cult¹ // Sketchy Characters and Marginalized Movements

Monday (7 November)

- ❖ Read: Hardacre, "Aum Shinrikyō and the Japanese Media," 171–204
- ❖ Read: Baffelli and Reader, "Competing for the Apocalypse," 5–28

Wednesday (9 November)

- ❖ Read: Thomas, "Horrific 'Cults' and Comic Religion," 127–51
- ❖ Read: Urasawa, *20th Century Boys*, Perfect Edition vol. 1
- ▶ Watch: ŌKAWA Ryūhō, dir. *The Rebirth of Buddha*
- ◎ Discuss: How have marginalized groups used media to transmit their messages, and how have mainstream media outlets depicted marginalized movements?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 山本直樹、『ビリーバーズ』1–52頁

Week 12: Cult² // Pilgrimage and Parody

Monday (14 November)

- ❖ Read: Davidsen, "Fiction-Based Religion," 378–95
- ❖ Read: Okamoto, "Otaku Tourism and the Anime Pilgrimage Phenomenon in Japan," 12–36

Wednesday (16 November)

- ❖ Read: Yamamura, "Contents Tourism and Local Community Response," 59–81
- ❖ Read: Andrews, "Genesis at the Shrine," 217–33
- ❖ In-class *manga kissaten!* Read Nakamura Hikaru, *Saint Young Men Omnibus*, vol. 1 (=volumes 1 and 2 of the original series).
- ◎ Discuss: The word "fan" derives from "fanatic," which in turn comes from the Latin word "temple" (*fanum*) and indicates one who is inspired by, possessed by, or acts in zealous devotion to a deity. With this etymology in mind, what's the relationship between media fandom and religion?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 中村光、^{セイント}『聖 ☆おにいさん』、PAGES TBD

Week 13: Idol // Object and Aura

Monday (21 November)

- ❖ Read: Galbraith and Karlin, "The Mirror of Idols and Celebrity," 1–32
- ❖ Read: Porcu, "Pop Religion in Japan," 157–72
- ❖ Read: Thomas, "The Buddhist Virtues of Raging Lust and Crass Materialism in Contemporary Japan," 485–506
- ▶ KON Satoshi, dir. *Perfect Blue* (1997, 121 mins.) CW: Stalking & sexual assault
- Discuss: "Idol" refers both to a material or visual manifestation of a deity and to a celebrity. How do our readings and film for this week engage with this malleable concept? What's the difference between idolization and idolatry?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: TBA

Week 14: Fetish // Gender, Sexuality, Consumption

Monday (28 November)

- ❖ Read: Saitō, *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, 3–44

Wednesday (30 November)

- ❖ Read: Kam, "The Anxieties that Make the Otaku," 39–61
- ▶ KORE'EDA Hirokazu, dir. *Air Doll* (2009, 125 mins.) CW: Sexual assault, suicide
- Discuss: In its original sense, a "fetish" is a material object imbued with extraordinary agency or spiritual power. Derivations from this original usage include excessive attributions of value to objects beyond their mere use-value (Marx's "commodity fetish") or unusual allocation of libido to specific objects, body parts, or actions (Freud's notion of sexual cathexis).
- ◆ Japanese challenge: TBA

Week 15: Animism // Who's the Matter?

Monday (5 December)

- ❖ Read: Yoneyama, "Rethinking Human-Nature Relationships in the Time of Coronavirus: Postmodern Animism in Films by Miyazaki Hayao & Shinkai Makoto," 1–16

Wednesday (7 December)

- ❖ Read: Thomas, "Spirit/Medium: A Critical Examination of the Putative Relationship between Anime and Animism," 157–70
- ▶ SHINKAI Makoto, dir. *Weathering with You* (2019; 112 minutes)

- ◎ Discuss: Why do Yoneyama and Thomas draw such different conclusions about the relationship between anime and animism?
- ◆ Japanese challenge: 川上弘美、「夏休み」 from 『カミサマ』, 19-36頁

Week 16: Wrap-Up

Monday (12 December)

No readings, but please come to class prepared to discuss the overall themes of the course and the final paper topic.

RESPONSE PAPER #3 DUE ON 12/16

The prompt for response paper #3 will be available on Canvas to people who enroll in the course. Early submissions are encouraged.



A votive tablet (*ema*) featuring Sailor Mars at Hikawa Shrine (氷川神社) in Tokyo. The Hikawa Shrine (火川神社) in *Sailor Moon* is modeled on this shrine.