

## THE POLITICS OF SHINTŌ

**THIS IS A DRAFT. READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.**

RELS 2710/6710 EALC 2550/EALC 6550 TUESDAYS 5:15–8:14

Shintō-derived images and ideas frequently appear in Japanese anime and film, and journalists and academics frequently mobilize the term “Shintō” as a way of explaining Japan’s past or envisioning its future. The environmentalist left champions a “green” Shintō while Shintō-derived ideas serve as red meat for politicians pandering to Japan’s nationalist right. While the influential position Shintō occupies in Japanese sociopolitical life is therefore clear, the term “Shintō” itself is not. Depending on who one asks, Shintō is either the indigenous religion of the Japanese archipelago, the irreducible core of Japanese culture, a subset of Japanese Buddhism, an oppressive political ideology linked to Japanese imperialism, an environmentalist ethic, or some combination of all of the above. This course investigates multifarious types of Shintō while showing that definitions of Shintō have always been politically charged.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this course is therefore not to provide a definitive answer as to “what Shintō really is,” but rather to investigate how different interest groups read their own interests into an ambiguous category. Class sessions pair secondary readings from anthropology, folklore studies, history, and religious studies with readings in primary texts covering topics such as eco-religion and animism, religion and nationalism, the invention and preservation of tradition, the politics of memory, popular history, gender, and architecture.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

The purpose of a liberal arts education is not merely the accumulation of facts. This course is designed to foster skills in metacognition (thinking about thinking), public speaking, and persuasive writing. Students will identify stereotypes and examine prevailing assumptions, learn about ways that competing groups read their own interests into the category “Shintō,” and develop some facility with scholarly theories about religion as it relates to the state, memory, folklore, geography, and politics. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to speak authoritatively and sensitively about Tokyo’s controversial Yasukuni Shrine, the relationship (or not) between Shintō and environmentalism, and the politics of shrine priests’ associations and associated political pressure groups such as the Jinja Honchō and Shintō Seiji Renmei.

### COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This is a discussion-based course, meaning that you are expected to be mentally present for every class session. Each student will be responsible for leading class discussion on one or two occasions, depending on how many people are in the course. Preparation as course leader means reading the assigned readings carefully and delivering a 10-minute presentation on the salient points, confusing passages, or connections to other readings or current events.

After the student presentation at the start of each class, the balance of our 3-hour sessions will be divided between discussion of course readings, mini-lectures summarizing scholarship that has only been published in Japanese, and in-depth explorations of primary sources such as manga, anime, propaganda films, paper theater (*kamishibai*), shrine pamphlets, music videos,

television commercials, Allied Occupation directives, websites, and corporate promotional materials. Many class sessions will involve work with these primary materials individually or in small groups; you may be required to read short handouts of about 2–5 pages in class.

Reading averages about 125 pages per week for undergraduates, and about a book and a half/week for grad students. The reading load lightens considerably in the last two weeks of class.

### **GRAD STUDENT SESSIONS**

The course is divided into four parts. At the end of each of these parts, I will host a separate meeting for graduate students to discuss the grad-level readings, which are listed on the righthand side of the table of readings below. The meetings will be scheduled at a time that works for all grad students in the course; grad students will skip “normal” class on these weeks and come to the grad student session instead. (This arrangement leaves time for undergrad-only discussions, which have their own merit.) Grad students should come to these meetings having read and taken notes on the assigned books; we will discuss the books and how they tie in with the general readings for the course.

### **A NOTE ON DECORUM**

As a general guideline for class discussions, please hold in mind that Shintō is a hotly contested political topic. Sites like Yasukuni are sources of political contention both within Japan and also in the broader East Asian region. Some of your classmates may think of themselves as adherents of Shintō or devotees of specific *kami*, while others may find Shintō to be intellectually puzzling or ethically challenging. Please come to class prepared to stick to the facts, ready to change your mind, and open to civil disagreement.

### **ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT**

Grading in this course happens on a 100-point scale, so “points” and “percentage” of your grade is the same. I provide rubrics for all assignments.

10% of your grade is based on your presentation as discussion leader. You will be assessed on the accuracy of your summary (5%) and the quality of your discussion questions (5%).

Another 10% is based on your engagement with class material, usually as evidenced by your regular attendance and evident participation in class activities and discussion. (Participation does not always mean talking, but in some cases may simply be indicated by attentive posture, contribution to group activities, or written contributions on the course discussion board.)

You have four response papers, each worth 20% of your grade. (Grading rubric available on Canvas.)

- Response Paper #1 (500–1000 words; 3 February): What is Shintō? Name some wrong answers and offer a better one.
- Response Paper #2 (500–1000 words; 25 February): Popular sources such as Wikipedia often describe Shintō as a religion primarily concerned with ritual purity. But Shintō priests and other historical actors have often tried to purify Shintō itself by clearly demarcating it from other practices and traditions. Who has tried to purify Shintō in this way, and with what results? Pick at least two concrete cases as examples.

- Response Paper #3 (500–1000 words; 24 March): The concept of “State Shintō” suggests an oppressive or illegitimate amalgamation of religion and politics. Where is this concept persuasive, and what are its limits?
- Response Paper #4 (No more than 2000 words; 5 May): Pick two books from the “Grad Student Readings” and write a comparative critical review. Your review should introduce the content while comparing and contrasting the different approaches of the authors.

### **RESEARCH PAPER OPTION**

If you prefer, you can skip the third and fourth response papers and instead write a final project that gives you more free rein. (I prefer and recommend this option for graduate students.) If you choose this option, you must reflect on “the politics of Shintō” in an open-ended research project that incorporates some of our course readings and some readings that you have found on your own. The paper should offer a lucid, evidentially substantiated, rationally argued analysis of some aspect of Shintō and politics. No more than 4000 words for undergraduates; no more than 6000 words for graduate students.

For those who choose this option, the research paper will be worth 40% of your grade. It is broken down into smaller components to help you through the stages of the research process (bibliography=5%, abstract=5%, peer review=10%, final submission=20%).

### **EXTENSION POLICY**

I want you to feel like you are able to do your best work, so I readily grant extensions to students who are having trouble making deadlines due to conflicts with assignment deadlines in other courses. However, there is a limit to the length and number of extensions I am willing to grant.

Typically, I will be most amenable to extension requests that come before the due date and ask for reasonable accommodations. Most extension requests are for 24–48 hours, although in extreme or extenuating circumstances I may offer up to a week. Longer extensions tend to get students in trouble with stacked up assignments and should therefore be avoided.

### **PLAGIARISM POLICY**

I like teaching this course because Shintō studies is a relatively small field, which means that students can get a good grasp on the field in the space of one semester. But precisely because the field is small, it is easy to spot plagiarism! Please follow standard academic citation practice and attribute all ideas that are not your own to the authors who generated them. (When in doubt, follow the Chicago Manual of Style, but I will accept any consistent citation style.)

If I determine that you have engaged in academic misconduct, I will give you a failing grade for the assignment. Because each writing assignment is worth 20% of your grade, this quickly puts you in danger of earning a low final grade or possibly failing the course.

Simply put: plagiarism is not worth it! If you’re struggling to finish, ask for an extension and/or come to my drop-in hours to discuss strategies for success.

## Course Schedule

Date	Required Readings	Grad Student Readings
<b>Part I: The Basics</b>		
Week 1 17 January Introductions	Read in class: Thomas, " <a href="#">What Is Shintō?</a> " (800 words)	• Thomas, " <a href="#">Big Questions in the Study of Shinto</a> "
Week 2 24 January Definitions and Disagreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Havens, "Shintō," 14–37</li> <li>• Kuroda, "Shintō in the History of Japanese Religion," 1–22</li> <li>• Breen and Teeuwen, <i>A New History of Shintō</i>, 1–23</li> <li>• Hardacre, <i>Shintō: A History</i>, 1–16</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teeuwen, "From Jindō to Shintō," 233–263</li> <li>• MacWilliams and Okuyama, <i>Defining Shintō</i>, 1–25</li> </ul>
Week 3 31 January The Power of Myth and the Myths of Power	<b>Undergrad-only Meeting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambros, <i>Women in Japanese Religions</i>, 5–39</li> <li>• Borgen &amp; Ury, "Readable Japanese Mythology," 61–97</li> <li>• Stockdale, <i>Imagining Exile</i>, 17–42</li> <li>• Carlqvist, "The Land-Pulling Myth and Some Aspects of Historic Reality," 185–222</li> </ul>	<b>Grad Student Meeting on DATE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Como, "Immigrant Gods on the Road to Jindo"</li> <li>• Ooms, <i>Imperial Politics and Symbolics in Ancient Japan</i>, xv–48</li> </ul>
<b>Response Paper #1:</b> What is Shintō? Name some wrong answers and offer a better one.  500–1000 words, due by midnight on 3 February. 20 points.  <i>Undergrads: If you struggle to answer this question or want more sources to draw on, check out the graduate student readings from Week 2.</i>		
<b>Part II: Combination and Purification</b>		
Week 4 7 February Combinatory Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rambelli and Teeuwen, "Combinatory Religion and the <i>honji suijaku</i> Paradigm in Premodern Japan," 1–53</li> <li>• Satō, "Wrathful Deities and Saving Deities," 95–114</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Andreeva, <i>Assembling Shinto</i></li> <li>• OPTIONAL Japanese reading: Satō, "Amaterasu ōmikami no henbō," 115–46</li> </ul>

Date	Required Readings	Grad Student Readings
Week 5  14 February  Cosmology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rambelli, "Religion, Ideology of Domination, and Nationalism," 387–426</li> <li>• Zhong, <i>The Origin of Modern Shintō in Japan</i>, 88–130</li> <li>• Josephson, <i>The Invention of Religion in Japan</i>, 94–163</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zhong, <i>The Origin of Modern Shintō in Japan</i></li> </ul>
Week 6  21 February  Purification	<b>Undergrad-only Meeting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grapard, "Japan's Ignored Cultural Revolution," 240–65</li> <li>• Thal, "Redefining the Gods," 379–404</li> <li>• Inoue, "The Formation of Sect Shintō in Modernizing Japan," 407–427</li> </ul>	<b>Grad Student Meeting on DATE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sarah Thal, <i>Rearranging the Landscape of the Gods</i></li> </ul>
<b>Response Paper #2:</b> Popular sources such as Wikipedia often describe Shintō as a religion primarily concerned with ritual purity. But Shintō priests and other historical actors have often tried to purify Shintō itself by clearly demarcating it from other practices and traditions. Who has tried to purify Shintō in this way, and with what results? Pick at least two concrete cases as examples.  500–1000 words, due by midnight on 25 February. 20 points.		
<b>Part III: Religion/Not-Religion</b>		
Week 7  28 February  Monuments and Mausolea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shimizu, "Shintō Shrines and Secularism in Modern Japan, 1890–1945," 128–56</li> <li>• Van Goethem, "Heian Jingu: Monument or Shintō Shrine?" 1–26</li> <li>• Imaizumi, <i>Sacred Space in the Modern City</i>, 1–59</li> </ul>	<b>Pick one:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takenaka, <i>Yasukuni</i> (note that we are reading part of this book in Week 8)</li> <li>• Breen and Teeuwen, <i>A Social History of the Ise Shrines</i></li> </ul>
<b>Research Paper Track Only:</b> If you plan to do a final research paper instead of the last two response papers, you must submit a proposed research question to me by email by no later than midnight on 3 March. <u>This should be an answerable question, not just a topic.</u> I reserve the right to veto questions that seem unanswerable.  I will vet your topics and get back to you by the end of Spring Break (i.e., no later than 12 March).  If you choose the research paper option you do not have to write the last two response papers. If you start on the research paper option and then drop it because the topic is not feasible, you must complete the response papers instead to receive full credit in the course.		
<b>Spring Break</b>		

Date	Required Readings	Grad Student Readings
<p>Week 8</p> <p>14 March</p> <p>Coercion and Assimilation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nakai, "Coming to Terms with Reverence at Shrines," 109–53</li> <li>• Takenaka, <i>Yasukuni</i>, 94–130</li> <li>• Henry, <i>Assimilating Seoul</i>, 1–14; 62–91</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pick One:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• David Weiss, <i>The God Susanoo and Korea in Japan's Cultural Memory</i></li> <li>• Karli Shimizu, <i>Overseas Shintō Shrines</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Research Paper Track Only:</b></p> <p>Submit a bibliography of at least five secondary sources that you plan to use in your research paper. These sources may appear on the course syllabus, but ideally you will include at least a couple of additional sources. If you plan to do work on primary sources such as historical documents, you can indicate which sources you plan to use here.</p> <p>Due on 17 March, to be followed by a one-on-one meeting to discuss your research plan. 5 points.</p>		
<p>Week 9</p> <p>21 March</p> <p>Top-Down or Bottom-Up?</p>	<p><b>Undergrad-only Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scheid, "Shintō Studies and the Nonreligious-Shrine Doctrine," 1–22</li> <li>• Sakamoto, "The Structure of State Shintō," 272–94</li> <li>• Azegami, "Local Shrines and the Creation of 'State Shintō,'" 63–85</li> <li>• Shimazono, "State Shintō in the Lives of the People," 93–124</li> <li>• Hardacre, <i>Shintō</i>, 403–40</li> </ul>	<p><b>Grad Student Meeting on DATE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thomas, <i>Faking Liberties</i>, esp. chs. 1 and 5</li> <li>• Okuyama, "'State Shintō' in Recent Japanese Scholarship," 123–45</li> <li>• Okuyama, "Rethinking 'State Shinto' in the Past and the Present," 163–84</li> </ul>
<p><b>Response Paper #3:</b></p> <p>The concept of "State Shintō" suggests an oppressive or illegitimate amalgamation of religion and politics. Where is this concept persuasive, and what are its limits?</p> <p>500–1000 words, due by midnight on 24 March. 20 points.</p> <p><i>Undergrads: If you want more sources to draw on, check out the grad student readings from week 9.</i></p>		
<p><b>Part IV: By the People, For the People</b></p>		
<p>Week 10</p> <p>28 March</p> <p>Jinja Honchō and the Shintō Political Alliance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seraphim, <i>War Memory and Social Politics in Japan</i>, 35–59</li> <li>• Mullins, <i>Yasukuni Fundamentalism</i>, 61–82</li> <li>• Larsson, "Jinja Honchō and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," 227–52</li> <li>• Breen, "Resurrecting the Sacred Land of Japan," 295–315</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mullins, <i>Yasukuni Fundamentalism</i></li> </ul>

Date	Required Readings	Grad Student Readings
<b>Research Paper Track Only:</b> Submit an abstract outlining the argument of your paper and the evidence that supports your claim.  No more than 150 words; due on 31 March. 5 points.		
Week 11  4 April  Spirit Possession and Divine Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E.G. Ooms, <i>Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan</i>, 1–19</li> <li>• Miura, “Shintō is the Indigenous Religion of the World,” 57–81</li> <li>• Davis, <i>Dojo</i>, 17–51</li> <li>• Gaitanidis and Murakami, “From Miko to Spiritual Therapist,” 1–35</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stalker, <i>Prophet Motive</i></li> </ul>
Week 12  11 April  Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miura, <i>Agents of World Renewal</i>, 109–29</li> <li>• Schnell, <i>The Rousing Drum</i>, 13–32</li> <li>• Hardacre, <i>Shintō: A History</i>, 475–507</li> </ul>	<b>Pick one:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miura, <i>Agents of World Renewal</i></li> <li>• Sawada, <i>Faith in Mount Fuji</i></li> </ul>
Week 13  18 April  Contestation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bernstein, “Whose Fuji?” 51–99</li> <li>• Carter, “Power Spots and the Charged Landscape of Shintō,” 145–73</li> <li>• Kato, “<a href="#">A Shintō Shrine’s Storytelling Strategy</a>”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mirsalis, <i>Gendering the Shintō Priesthood in Postwar Japan</i> (2022 Harvard University doctoral dissertation)</li> </ul>
<b>Research Paper Track Only:</b> Submit a draft of your paper to your assigned partner for peer review, cc’ing me. The paper should be finished enough for the person to discern your argument and main sources of evidence.  Due date: 21 April. 5 points.		
Week 14  25 April  Conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rots, “Sacred Forests, Sacred Nation,” 205–233</li> <li>• Watanabe, “The Politics of Nonreligious Aid,” 225–242</li> </ul>	<b>Pick one:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rots, <i>Shintō, Nature, and Environmentalism in Modern Japan</i></li> <li>• Watanabe, <i>Becoming One</i></li> </ul>
<b>Research Paper Track Only:</b> Review your partner’s paper, giving feedback on: 1) what the author did well; 2) what causal claims you found unpersuasive; 3) what structural adjustments might make the project clearer; and 4) what missing information could be added to help the reader.  Send your comments to your partner by no later than 28 April, cc’ing me. 5 points.		

Date	Required Readings	Grad Student Readings
<p><b>Response Paper #4:</b></p> <p>By this point you have read enough stuff from the tiny field of Shintō studies to offer an informed assessment of what specific authors have argued and how their work fits within broader conversations in the field. Building on this knowledge, pick two books from the “Grad Student Readings” and write a comparative critical review. Your review should be no longer than 2000 words and should introduce the content of the books while comparing and contrasting the different approaches of the authors.</p> <p>If you need an example of a comparative review, see Thomas, “<a href="#">Big Questions in the Study of Shintō</a>.” Note how Thomas broke his review down into subtopics to help the reader keep track of the big ideas.</p> <p>Here are some possible topics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Shintō and Japanese empire: Weiss and Shimizu (Week 8)</li><li>2) Shintō and “popular” or “folk” religion: Miura and Sawada (Week 12)</li><li>3) Shintō and environmentalism: Rots and Watanabe (Week 14)</li><li>4) Shintō, the Allied Occupation, and postwar politics: Thomas (Week 9) and Mullins (Week 10)</li><li>5) Shintō and gender: Stalker (Week 11) and Mirsalis (Week 13). Note: There is no good academic monograph on <i>miko</i> in English, although some studies exist in Japanese. In English, check out Lori Meeks, “The Disappearing Medium: Reassessing the Place of <i>Miko</i> in the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan,” <i>History of Religions</i> 50, no. 3 (2011): 208–60; and Gerald Groemer, “Female Shamans in Eastern Japan during the Edo Period,” <i>Asian Folklore Studies</i> 66 (2007): 27–53.</li><li>6) Shrines as contested sites: Takenaka (on Yasukuni, Week 7) along with either Breen and Teeuwen (on Ise, Week 7), Imaizumi (on Meiji Jingū, Week 7), or Zhong (Week 5)</li><li>7) Shrines before and after the early-Meiji <i>shinbutsu bunri</i> edicts separating <i>kami</i> worship from Buddhism: Thal (Week 6) and Zhong (Week 5)</li><li>8) Specific deities. Relevant books include Weiss (Week 8, on Susanoo), Zhong (Week 5, on Ōkuninushi) and other books not on the syllabus such as Karen Smyers, <i>The Fox and the Jewel</i> (on Inari) or Sujung Kim (on Shinra Myōjin).</li></ol> <p>This is a non-exhaustive list; please check with me about other topics you might like to pursue.</p> <p>Due no later than midnight on 5 May. 20 points.</p>		
<p><b>Research Paper Track Only:</b></p> <p>Submit your revised paper to me by May 5. 20 points.</p>		