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**How to Start a Religion:
Introduction to the New Religions of Japan
IPT5/711 • 10 – 14 July 2023**

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Starting a new religion is no easy task, but Japan has seen the rise and endurance of hundreds over the last two centuries, and several claim millions of members. Who starts them, who joins them, and what do they do together? What makes them “new”? Do they engage in social action? How do they understand themselves? New religions often begin with an individual whose experiences and insights become their followers’ means for learning how to live a good life. Many of Japan’s new religions formed within older Buddhist or Shintō institutions. Some claim a more revolutionary and universal scope, introducing novel mythologies and practices. With millions of members from every walk of life, thousands of facilities ranging from humble to grandiose, and even several political parties, Japan’s new religions are a vital, dynamic, and contested facet of religious activity in Japan today. New religious organizations and their members — in Japan and around the world — must navigate challenges related to law, media, the reputation of other new religions, and succession after a founder’s death.

This course introduces descriptive studies of several key organizations that have shaped Japan’s complex contemporary religious landscape, and explores theoretical topics within the field, including gender, conversion, secrecy, charisma, scandal, modernity, and material culture. Our case studies will include traditions that have also made a home in Vancouver. Students will learn to work with a conceptual toolset for understanding the founders, followers, practices, and teachings of Japan’s new religions, which can also be applied to the study of new religions around the globe.

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Engage critically with the academic study of new religions.
2. Identify current issues and problematics germane to the study of new and marginalized religious traditions.
3. Describe relevant analytical approaches to the study of Japanese new religions; and
4. Analyze new religions indigenous to East Asia and beyond using those approaches.
5. Communicate comprehension of the emergence and evolution of Japan’s new religions from the early 19th century until today.
6. Situate Japanese new religions within the history of modern Japan (circa 1800–present) and in relation to older Japanese religious traditions.

FORMAT AND CONTENT

This class will meet from 2 –5 PM on July 10–14. For on-campus students, work in the course consists of lectures, discussions, films, readings, and small group presentations. Distance students will participate synchronously through Zoom. Each day will include a case study of one or more new religion, topics germane to their study, and group discussions of these topics that lead into that day’s journaling activity.

Day 1 (July 10) – Introducing the Topic: What are Japan’s “new religions”?

Case studies: Tenrikyō and Aum Shinrikyō

Day 2 (July 11) – Founders and Phases: Explanatory theories for NRMs

Case study: Ōmoto

Day 3 (July 12) – Beyond Belief: The practices, places, and relationships of NRMs

Case study: Sōka Gakkai

Day 4 (July 13) – Japanese New Religions as Global Traditions

Case study: Happy Science

Day 5 (July 14) – Building for the Future: The evolution of NRMs, and implications for “religion”

Case study: Shinnyo-en

TEXTS

All required course readings will be available online or through the UBC Library.

EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

The expectations and assignments for this course include:

1. Completion of required readings before each class meeting. There will be 350–500 pages (certificate and 500-level) or 450–700 pages (600-level) of required readings. Please see the selected bibliography below.
2. Active participation in class discussions, group activities, and reflective exercises.
3. A final essay of 1500 (500-level) to 2000 (700-level) words. 500- and 700-level students will meet with me after class on Wednesday or Thursday to discuss their topics.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following items are key reference materials and scholarly works that inform course content and will be of interest to students who wish to conduct their own research, or for consultation when completing assignments. Use this bibliography to supplement the required course readings.

Religious Traditions of Japan

Josephson, Jason Ānanda. 2012. *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kasahara, Kazuo, ed. 2001. *A History of Japanese Religion*. Translated by Paul McCarthy and Gaynor Sekimori. 1st English ed. Tokyo: Kosei Pub.

Swanson, Paul L., and Clark Chilson, eds. 2006. *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*. Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

Tanabe, George J., ed. 1999. *Religions of Japan in Practice*. Princeton Readings in Religions. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

History of Modern Japan

Goto-Jones, Christopher. 2009. *Modern Japan: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Jansen, Marius B. 2002. *The Making of Modern Japan*. Harvard University Press.

Tipton, Elise K. 2002. *Modern Japan: A Social and Political History*. London: Routledge.

Reference Works (Religion, New Religions, East Asian New Religions)

Clarke, Peter, ed. 2005. *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*. London: Routledge.

Jones, Lindsay, ed. 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA.

Lewis, James R., and Inga Tøllefsen, eds. 2016. *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*. Second. Oxford University Press.

Pokorny, Lewis, and Franz Winter, eds. 2018. *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements*. Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion 16. Brill.

Japanese New Religions

Baffelli, Erica, and Ian Reader. 2019. *Dynamism and the Aging of a Japanese 'New Religion': Transformations and the Founder*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Davis, Winston Bradley. 1980. *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Earhart, H. Byron. 2000. *Gedatsu-Kai and Religion in Contemporary Japan: Returning to the Center*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hardacre, Helen. 1986. *Kurozumikyō and the New Religions of Japan*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

McLaughlin, Levi. 2018. *Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution: The Rise of a Mimetic Nation in Modern Japan*. University of Hawaii Press.

Pye, Michael. 2004. "New Religions in East Asia." In *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, edited by James R. Lewis, 491–513. Oxford University Press.

Reader, Ian-Tanabe, and George J. Tanabe. 1998. *Practically Religious : Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan*. Honolulu, HI, USA: University of Hawaii Press.

Stalker, Nancy K. 2008. *Prophet Motive: Deguchi Onisaburō, Oomoto, and the Rise of New Religions in Imperial Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Shimazono, Susumu. 2004. *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.