Study Questions

These study questions enable readers to use together Religion in Japan: Unity and Diversity, 5th ed., and the companion volume, Religion in the Japanese Experience: Sources and Interpretations, 2d ed., fourth printing. (The fourth printing includes updated material.) Those reading only one of these books may disregard the questions referring to the other work. (Teachers may wish to revise and supplement this set of study questions to fit their own classroom materials and needs.)

To utilize these study questions most efficiently, read them before beginning each assignment. Keeping the questions in mind, use them to identify the most important information. Then, after reading the material, test your general understanding by answering the questions. Any number of techniques may be used to answer the questions—making mental notes, underlining and writing in the book, keeping a journal. If you have trouble answering the questions, you may want to mention the troublesome points in class discussion.

Some of the questions point out key figures, events, and terms important for tracing the history of religion in Japan. Some questions are designed to make you think beyond the Japanese tradition to the nature of religion in other traditions, and to stimulate you to think about the nature of the human condition.

Introduction to Religion in Japan

Religion in Japan, pp. 1–7

Identify all the religious traditions and aspects of religious life found in Japanese history.
How can this plurality of traditions and aspects form a unity in the religious life of the individual? How can the diversity of religious expression result in unity at different levels of life?

Religion in Japan, pp. 9-17

Identify the six persistent themes in Japanese religious history, and try to weave together these six themes into a total picture of religion in Japan. (These notions of plurality, diversity, unity, and persistent themes will be helpful to you in unifying the material from both books.)

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 1–4

Note the major differences between religion in America and religion in Japan. Describe in your own words the major characteristics of Japanese religious life and the major outlines of Japanese religious history.

Religion in Japan, pp. 21–30

How did religion in Japan begin? What are the earliest forms of Japanese religiosity, and how are they related to economic, social, and political developments in early Japan? Describe how the religious significance of the dead, of fertility, and of divine descent all define a general pattern of religion in early Japan. (Use the “Table of Japanese Religious History” to view at a glance the social and religious history of Japan.)

The Kami Tradition

Religion in Japan, pp. 32-43
How does the notion of “the kami tradition” differ from previous notions of “Shinto” in early Japan? What is the difference between seeing Shinto as an organized religion, and viewing it as a “common set of physical symbols and ritual patterns” (p. 33)? Think about Woody Allen’s definition of tradition as “the illusion of permanence,” and try to come up with your own definition of “tradition” and “religion” that would cover not only Shinto and Buddhism, but also Daoism, Judaism, and Christianity. What are the major features of the kami tradition with regard to sacred spaces, mythology, and rituals?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 6–9

How did Shinto emerge from the prehistoric tradition, and what major changes has Shinto undergone?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 9–13

Compare and contrast the Judeo-Christian notion of God with the Japanese notion of kami. Give at least three examples of kami to show how a wide variety of “things” can be divine beings or kami. What are the general features of such kami?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 13–19

Compare and contrast the Judeo-Christian story of creation with the Japanese story of creation. Analyze the Japanese creation story, noting the conditions at the beginning of creation, who the most important figures are, and the process by which creation occurred. One scholar has described Japanese religion in terms of “a sacred people in a sacred land.” How does the creation story support such a description?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 19–22

Compare and contrast a Shinto shrine with a sacred place with which you are familiar, such as a church or a synagogue. What is it that makes a Shinto shrine “sacred”? What is the
relationship between nature and shrines? How do the kami, shrines, and Shinto worshipers relate to one another?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 34–38

Compare and contrast the role of women in Shinto with what you know about the role of women in Western religions such as Judaism and Christianity. What are the various ways and roles in which women appear within Shinto? Distinguish historically the roles of women within the three periods of “Primitive Shinto,” “Organized Shinto,” and “Shinto after the Meiji Restoration.”

**Early Buddhism in Japan**

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 46-59

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 45–47

How did the Indian religion of Buddhism happen to travel all the way to Japan, and how was it received in Japan? Why was Buddhism considered “the doctrine most excellent”? How did Buddhism, as a “world-renouncing” tradition, become involved in the secular world and government? What was the role of the imperial court and the state in the acceptance of Buddhism in Japan?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 47–49

Note the particular circumstances surrounding Buddhism’s arrival in Japan from Korea. How did the Korean envoys describe Buddhism, and how did the Japanese look upon this “foreign” religion?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 50–54
Describe the way in which Buddhist divinities and *kami* came to be very closely related—almost like two sides of the same coin. To what extent should we view this relationship as the influence of Buddhist divinities on Shinto *kami*, and to what extent is it the influence of Shinto *kami* on Buddhist divinities?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 76–80

What has been the role of nuns in Buddhism from the time of the Buddha, and what was their role in Japanese Buddhism? Summarize the “life in a Zen nunnery” in contemporary times. How would you compare and contrast the role of nuns in Japanese Buddhism with the role of women in Shinto (pp. 34–38)?

**Daoism and Confucianism**

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 61-73

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, p. 103

How would you characterize the two “ways” of Daoism and Confucianism? How did elements of Daoism come to Japan? What are the major components of Daoism and Chinese customs in Japan? What impact did they have on Japanese culture and religion?

How did Confucianism come to Japan? What are the major components of Confucianism? What impact did it have on Japanese culture and religion?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 120–125

Describe and analyze the Daoist-influenced Koshin cult, explaining the religious theory behind the cult and the practices the cult group (*ko*) engages in.
Folk Religion

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, p. 126

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 77-86

How does folk religion differ from organized religion, and what are the major aspects of Japanese folk religion? Compare and contrast the “little tradition” and the “great tradition.” How is folk religion delicately woven into family, village, occupational, and individual life? How would you sum up the notions of “folk, tradition, and religion” (pp. 84-86)?


Identify each of the “rites of passage” mentioned and the religious observances for each rite. What is the “discernible belief structure” expressed by all these rites of passage “as a homogeneous whole”? What similarities/differences do you see between rites of passage in Japan and in other cultures such as America?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 129–135

Trace carefully the steps by which a woman enters the sacred calling of a blind medium—list each of the requirements of this training. “Once a girl is fully initiated and possessed of her instruments of power,” what tasks is she expected to perform? Characterize each of these religious tasks.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 135–139

Sum up the story and message of each folk tale. How do folk tales constitute one aspect of folk religion?
Interaction in Early Religion in Japan

*Religion in Japan, pp. 89-92*

By about the ninth century how have all the five formative traditions interacted to constitute Japanese religion? Describe the general picture of religion in Japan in the ninth century. What is a “multipolar system,” and how can this term describe religion in Japan?

Tendai and Shingon Buddhism

*Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 81–83*

Explain the different roles of Buddhism within Japanese religion by contrasting “Buddhism in Japan” with “Japanese Buddhism.”

*Religion in Japan, pp. 95-113*

What are the major features and events of the Heian period (794-1185)? Identify the major teachings and practices of Tendai and Shingon Buddhism. What changes were brought about by the founders of these two Buddhist sects? What are the major contributions of Kukai and Saicho? How did Shingon and Tendai provide a new basis for establishing Japanese Buddhism? Compare and contrast the earlier Nara Buddhism with Tendai and Shingon Buddhism.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 54–60*

What are “expedient means” and “parable” in the *Lotus Sutra*, and how does the story of the rich man and his burning house illustrate these religious techniques? The phrase *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* is the equivalent of “true enlightenment” or “perfect understanding”; what does the *Lotus Sutra* say is necessary for attaining this state?
What are the major features of Dengyo Daishi’s regulations for ordinand students within monastic Buddhism? Dengyo Daishi says that these eight articles, or regulations, “uphold the Buddha’s Dharma, benefit the nation, draw sentient beings to the true teaching, and encourage future students to do good.” How would you interpret the regulations as carrying out these intentions?

What are the major features of Kobo Daishi’s (Kukai’s) “list of newly imported sutras and other items”? Kobo Daishi says that the teaching of esoteric Buddhism (or Dharma) “is as useful to the nation as walls are to a city, and as fertile soil is to the people”; how would you interpret these items as having such value? How does Kobo Daishi’s (Kukai’s) notion of Dharma differ from Dengyo Daishi’s (Saicho’s) view of Dharma, pp. 83–85?

The Shrine Tradition and Shugendo

Define a “shrine-temple complex” and describe Kasuga-Kofukuji as an example of a “shrine-temple complex.” Describe the major features of Ise Shrine. Summarize the major features of Shugendo as “the way of mastering ascetic power in the mountains.”

Elaboration within Japanese Buddhism

Trace the developments in Buddhism from Heian to Kamakura times (1185-1333).
**Pure Land Buddhism**

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 131-137

Define Pure Land, Amida, and *nenbutsu*, and explain how they are central to Honen’s message. What is the significance of Honen’s One-Page Testament? Compare and contrast the message of Honen and Shinran. Summarize the faith of Honen’s wife, the Buddhist nun Eshinni, and the significance of her dream.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 88–91

What are the major features of Honen’s “parting message”? How can “the method of final salvation” be “the mere repetition of the ‘Namu Amida Butsu’”? How would you compare Honen’s “advice on the repetition of the nenbutsu” to the teachings of Saicho and Kukai, pp. 83–85 and 85–88?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 91–94

What are the major features of Shinran’s recommendation of “‘Just say the Name and be saved by Amida’”? Shinran contrasted Other Power and Self Power—which does he prefer and why? How does Shinran’s ideal of Buddhism differ from that of Saicho, Kukai, and Honen?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 65–73

The novel *The Buddha Tree* describes devotion to Amida. Interpret in your own words what devotion to Amida means. What problem do people have that needs help from Amida? What is the frame of mind in which people approach Amida? What religious power does Amida represent, such that Amida can grant this request?
**Medieval Buddhism**

*Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 60–65*

How does LaFleur interpret medieval Japan as defined and determined by Buddhism? How did medieval Buddhism provide “not only salvation” but also a “map of reality”? What is the rokudo (“six courses”), and how does this “pervasive idea” determine the “depiction of the universe” in medieval Japan? Sum up in your own words this view of the world.

**Nichiren Buddhism**

*Religion in Japan, pp. 137-139*

Trace Nichiren’s development from monastic training to faith in the Lotus Sutra. What is the spiritual connection between the Lotus Sutra, Sakyamuni, and the mandala of the title of the Lotus Sutra?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 94-98*

What are the major features of Nichiren’s advocacy of the teaching and chanting of “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo”? Outline Nichiren’s critique of Honen. How does Nichiren’s understanding of Buddhism differ from that of Saicho, Kukai, Honen, and Shinran?

**Zen Buddhism**

*Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 139-147*
What are the major features of Dogen’s recommendation of sitting in meditation (zazen)? Contrast the practice of zazen and koan as found in Dogen’s teaching. How does Dogen’s understanding of Buddhism differ from that of Saicho, Kukai, Honen, Shinran, and Nichiren? Identify the major teachings and practices of Pure Land, Nichiren, and Zen Buddhism. How did each of these movements focus on faith (or devotion) and a single or “exclusive practice”? How did these movements help transform Japanese Buddhism into a more popular religion?

From Kami and Shrine Tradition to Shinto

Religion in Japan, pp. 151-158

Why do scholars such as Kuroda decide not to use the term “Shinto” for the ancient and medieval beliefs in kami and practices at shrines? Summarize the discussion about the terms “Shinto” and “Jindo.” Explain the difference between the two phrases “kami secondary to Buddhas,” and “Buddhas secondary to kami.” Define honji suijaku. At what point in Japanese history should the kami and shrine tradition be called “Shinto”?

How does medieval Shinto differ from early Shinto? How does thorough interaction of Shinto with Buddhism alter the character of Shinto? To what extent, and in what way, does medieval Shinto tend to assume its own organizational style?

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 23–25

Notice the attitude and emotions in the medieval pilgrim to one of the most important Shinto shrines. Compare and contrast this pilgrim’s frame of mind with the frame of mind of the priest practicing a devotion to Amida (pp. 65–73).
The Christian Century

Religion in Japan, pp. 161-169

How did the European religion of Christianity happen to travel all the way to Japan, and how was it received in Japan? Compare and contrast the earlier arrival of another “foreign” religion, Buddhism. (How did Buddhism become a permanent part of the Japanese tradition, whereas Christianity had much greater difficulties?) Analyze political and economic factors related to the acceptance of Christianity, and explain how Christianity was expelled from Japan.

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 140–144

How does the author interpret the “Christian century” as “acceptance and rejection of Catholicism”? List the author’s reasons for both the acceptance and the rejection of Catholicism.

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 144–149

How does Fabian explain his conversion to Christianity, and later his departure from Christianity? Sum up Fabian’s treatment of Christian teaching (given in the sections “The adherents of Deus claim”), and his refutation of that teaching (given in the sections “To counter, I reply”).

The Five Traditions: Development and Mutual Influence

Religion in Japan, pp. 171-173

By about the sixteenth century, how have all the formative traditions interacted and
developed in such a way as to constitute a distinctively Japanese heritage? Describe the
general picture of religion in the sixteenth century.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 157–161

Identify Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, and Shinto elements in this medieval will, and show how they are interrelated in the personal code of conduct of a medieval man. Describe in your own words this man’s philosophy of life.


Identify Buddhist, Confucian, and Shinto elements in this formal government document, and show how they are interrelated in the policy of late medieval government. Describe in your own words this government’s general philosophy of life.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 163–164

Identify Buddhist, Confucian, and Shinto elements in this late medieval teacher’s statement. Describe in your own words this teacher’s prescription for religious cooperation.

**Closeness of Humans, Gods, and Nature**

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 166–169

Interpret in your own words the theme of “closeness of humans, gods, and nature.” Within this theme, treat Matsudaira Sadanobu’s “self-deification,” or “blend of the profane and sacred.” How does Ooms place Sadanobu’s self-deification within the context of Japanese religious history?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 170–172

Analyze the attitude toward nature and gods in these poems. What do they tell us about
ancient Japanese poetry and about the blending of religious and aesthetic themes?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 172–76

Analyze the understanding and expression of nature in Japanese theories of art, and try to locate the same in the painting of Sesshu. How do religious and aesthetic values concerning nature blend in these verbal and graphic expressions?


In what way do *haiku* convey both an artistic and a religious message? Analyze the religious significance in each of the *haiku* in this selection.

**The Family, Living and Dead**

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 181–84

In what way is the *dozoku* both a social and a religious institution? What is the religious significance of the calendar of festivals for the *dozoku*?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 185–88

Trace the process by which a corpse passes from a state of pollution to the purified state of an ancestor. Who must do what in order for this process to be successful? Note especially the roles of the household members and Buddhist priests.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 73–76

How does the author interpret the relationship between Buddhism, on the one hand, and families and ancestors, on the other hand? Identify and characterize the three connotations of Buddhist temple (*tera* or *jiin*) in Japan. What are the characteristics of “Buddhism as an Organized Religion,” and how is the organization of Buddhism similar to the structure of the
As the author describes Japanese religion and festivals, note her contrast between the roles of males and females. What is “androcentrism,” and what does she mean by the statement “This androcentrism [of Shinto and Buddhism] is peculiarly lacking in nontraditional religions”? Describe the Japanese woman’s “roles as a custodian of the butsudan and household religion . . . and as a liaison between the household and the temple.”

**Purification, Rituals, and Amulets**

What are the “sins” to be exorcised in the Great Exorcism, and what are the means of purification in this ritual? On the basis of this ritual, compare and contrast purification in Japanese religion with sin in Christianity.

In this literary episode of evil spirits possessing Genji’s wife (Aoi), what human and spiritual agents are thought to be responsible for this possession? What measures are taken to exorcise the malign spirits? How does the treatment of Aoi’s corpse reflect the view that malign spirits were responsible for her death?

Identify each of the ritual observances in the “annual round of observances” and the religious practices for each annual observance. Note how Miyake, after describing this annual round of observances, groups them into three categories: (1) ancestral festivals, (2)
agricultural festivals, and (3) rituals of exorcism and purification. Characterize each of these three categories. Compare and contrast these Japanese observances with what you know of festivals (or holidays) in America and Europe.

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 212–217

How does Yanagawa view the divergent or contrasting elements of festivals? Why does this author focus on the fact that in a festival “a person enters a state akin to religious ecstasy”? How does he contrast the notion of “structure” with “raw experience”? How does he relate matsuri, or festival, to the five senses (and bodily senses)?

Religion and Everyday Life

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 218–221

What is the religious significance of archaeological remains, and how do they throw light on the penetration of religion in the daily life of prehistoric times?

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 221–225

Use this selection to analyze the interrelationship between “social structure and folk religion.” How does Hori use the notions of “little tradition” and the “great tradition” to identify “the essence of Japanese folk religion”?

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 225–230

Follow the sequence of actions in the Shinto wedding ceremony. Compare the events in a Shinto marriage with the events in a Buddhist marriage and a home marriage. What similarities/differences do you notice in these Japanese ceremonies, compared with wedding ceremonies you have seen in your own culture?
Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 230–233

What is the religious significance of the “art of tea”? Relate this religious significance to the place, attitudes, and performance of the tea ceremony.

Religion and State

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 234–236

What is the significance of Prince Shotoku’s “constitution” as a precedent for the relationship between state and religion? Identify the religious traditions mentioned in the “constitution” and try to state the principle by which they are interrelated (in Shotoku’s conception).

Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, and Shinto in the Tokugawa Period

Religion in Japan, pp. 175-192

Sum up in your own words the Tokugawa anti-Christianity policy and the notion of “funerary Buddhism.” What are the arguments for the decadence or vitality of Tokugawa Buddhism? How did Neo-Confucianism provide political stability and social conformity? How did Restoration Shinto represent a movement for a “purified Shinto”? What was Motoori Norinaga’s contribution to Restoration Shinto?

Neo-Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan

Religion in the Japanese Experience, pp. 104–109
Explain how, in Nosco’s words, Confucianism has “left its mark on Japanese society.”

Summarize the teaching of the Chinese Confucianist Chu His (Zhu Xi). How did Neo-Confucianism blend with Shinto and Buddhist elements to help “legitimize” the Tokugawa government?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 109–113

How does Ooms contrast the previous view of early Tokugawa political thought as “simply a transplant of a monolithic body” of Chinese Neo-Confucianism, with his own view of Tokugawa ideology as “a conversion of thought constructs into a serviceable ideology”? Trace the career of Hayashi Razan and his role in establishing “the fiction of a Neo-Confucian . . . orthodoxy.”

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 113–115

How does Hayashi Razan use Neo-Confucianism to argue for “ruling and living in conformity with the order of heaven and earth”? How does Hayashi Razan argue for the unity of Shinto and Confucianism over against Buddhism?

**Restoration Shinto**

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 25–28

How did Kitabatake, in medieval times, establish the argument for Japan’s uniqueness and superiority? Trace Kitabatake’s argument for Japan’s uniqueness, especially in contrast to India and China.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 28–34

How does Matsumoto define and interpret *mono no aware* as “the key concept
representing the essence of Norinaga’s thought”? Trace the author’s argument about *mono no aware*, and put in your own words the term’s meaning as contained in the quotations from Norinaga.

**The Meiji Restoration and State Shinto**

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 195-212

What were the key political events of the Meiji Restoration, and how was religion interwoven with these political events? Trace the changes within Shinto during this period, such as the attempt to purify and restore Shinto, showing how it emerged as “nationalistic Shinto” or State Shinto. Define “nonreligious Shrine Shinto.” Define the *kokutai* cult. How are nationalism and religion interrelated in Japan? How would you compare/contrast the interrelationship of nationalism and religion in Western countries such as the United States?)

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 236–237

Analyze the Imperial Rescript on Education in terms of its religious motivation, its political motivation, and its educational objectives. Compare this document with Shotoku’s “Constitution” (p. 225) to show how it represents continuity with ancient themes. In what ways does it also constitute a remarkable change?

**Religious Currents from 1868–1945**

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 217-230

What are the major features of the textbook *Kokutai no hongi*? Sum up “outside criticism” and “inside criticism” in Meiji Buddhism. What were the strengths and
weaknesses of Meiji Christianity? Why and how did the New Religions succeed in late
Tokugawa and Meiji times?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 150–152

What is the gist of Uchimura’s criticism of Western missionary notions, and what does he
mean when he proposes a “Japanese Christianity”? *Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 115–119

What does “the nationalisation of Confucianism in Japan” mean, and how did this kind of

What religious principles are used as the basis for the *Kokutai no hongi*, and how were these
principles used to support the *Kokutai no hongi*? What are the general objectives of this
document?

**New Religions**

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 234-240

Summarize the differences and similarities among the many new religions.

Trace the emergence, organization, and activities of Tenrikyo. How does the phrase “a
living kami and a joyous life” sum up the ethos of Tenrikyo? Rephrase in your own words the
two statements of Tenrikyo members (pp. 239-240) about *karma or innen*.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 268–274

Analyze the revelation experience of the founder of Tenrikyo. First identify in this
revelation experience the religious elements from the earlier tradition. Then show how this revelation has new features that lead to a New Religion.

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 241-246

Trace the emergence, organization, and activities of Soka Gakkai. How does the phrase “faith in the *Lotus Sutra* and a happy life sum up the ethos of Soka Gakkai? Rephrase in your own words the statement of a Soka Gakkai member (pp. 245-246) relating his “personal success story.”

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 275–278

Analyze the “message” of Soka Gakkai, first identifying the religious goal and then showing how people can reach this goal. What is the relationship between the individual’s daily worship, missionary work (*shakubuku*), and the discussion meetings?

How do Tenrikyo and Soka Gakkai compare and contrast with one another, and how do they compare and contrast with traditional Shinto and Buddhism?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 152–156

Summarize the career of Teshima, the founder of the Makuya movement of Christianity. What are the institutional features of Makuya, and its major religious practices? How does the author compare Makuya to Japanese New Religions? What is the significance of his statement that “The Makuya is the only movement to indigenize Christianity . . . in the Japanese lower classes”?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 279–283

Restate the argument here that entry into a New Religion is a “process of reorientation of life set in motion by the cure or counseling.” How does the author describe and interpret the experiences of the couple (the Abes) in joining Kurozumikyo? How did the Abes use their
faith in Kurozumikyo to diagnose and resolve their problems?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 283–288

Restate the argument here that four kinds of Buddhist power can be found within the worldview of Japanese New Religions. How does the author describe and interpret a young man’s work experience as a testimony to his faith in Gedatsu-kai? What problems did the young man face in work? How did his faith in Gedatsu-kai help him to diagnose and resolve those problems?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 288–290

How does the author describe and interpret Miss Nakata’s entry into the New Religion Mahikari? How does Miss Nakata’s previous religious experience and possession influence her to join Mahikari? How did Miss Nakata resolve her problems after joining Mahikari?

Reflect on the life stories of members in Tenrikyo, Soka Gakkai, Makuya, Kurozumikyo, and Gedatsu-kai. How do these life stories express the ethos of New Religions?

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 247-255

Trace the emergence, organization, and activities of Aum Shinrikyo. Contrast the terms “world affirming” and “world renouncing,” and explain how Aum Shinrikyo is a “world-renouncing” New-New religion. How do you account for the “marriage of religion to violence” in Aum Shinrikyo? After reading about Aum Shinrikyo and the comparative remarks on religion and violence, how do you interpret the relationship of religion to violence in Japan, and in other traditions?

*Religion in Japan*, 255-256

After reading about these New Religions, how would you sum up their significance for understanding religion in Japan? What similarities and differences do you find in the
personal statements of members of New Religions?

**Religion in Postwar Japan**

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 244–245

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 261-275

How did the end of World War II lead to Shinto’s disestablishment, national reorganization, and modified local participation? What are the major features of “A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine”?

Discuss the situation of postwar Buddhism as a tension between degeneration and regeneration. Interpret the dilemma of modern Buddhism as stated by Covell (pp. 271-272): “The sects of Temple Buddhism today are trapped between financial necessities, traditional postmortem ritual roles, and their desire to be seen as sincere Buddhist practitioners.”

Interpret the situation of postwar Christianity as being hampered by denominationalism and perception as a foreign tradition.

Interpret the phenomenon of the postwar boom of New Religions.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 38–44

What was the status of Shinto in 1945? Why was the Allied Occupation opposed to the continuation of this status? How did the Occupation eliminate this status without interfering with freedom of religion? How did this directive affect Shinto? In his Imperial Edict, how does the emperor appeal to the past? How does he change the religious-mythical heritage? What does he see for the future?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 245–250
What is the religious ideal of Buddhism? How was this ideal compromised in the twentieth century? How can the ideal be restored?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 251–255

What is the religious ideal of Shinto? How was this ideal compromised in the twentieth century? How can the ideal be restored?


In what way have changing conditions in Tokyo generally affected the people’s religious life? How have these changed circumstances affected traditional Shinto and traditional Buddhism?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 263–267

The pornographers are secularists; nothing is sacred. Interpret this secularism in terms of the contrast between filming a pornographic movie at a shrine and the sincere piety of the old lady at the shrine. Why do these “secularist” pornographers still have to resort to their own kind of ritual at the wake? Interpret the religious significance of replacing a Buddhist sutra with a pornographic film.

**Religious Life in Contemporary Japan**

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 279-299

How would you characterize religious life in contemporary Japan? How would you compare and contrast “being religious” in Japan and in Western countries? Over the centuries, how has religion in Japan remained the same, and how has it changed in the past century or so? Recently, how has religion in Japan declined, and how has it “increased” or
expanded? Identify the major transformations of religious life in contemporary Japan, paying particular attention to death rites.

Identify major modalities of alternative reality in contemporary Japan, paying particular attention to Tokyo Disneyland and manga. What do two novels, Orwell’s *1984*, and Murakami’s *1Q84*, tell us about the human situation in Japan and in the wider world?

**The History and Future of Religion in Japan**

*Religion in Japan*, pp. 303-307

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 291–292

Now that you have studied twenty-five hundred years of the history of religion in Japan, how do you view its future? How do you see the chances for this tradition (1) dying out, (2) remaining the same, and (3) changing? How would you compare and contrast the future of religion in Japan with the future of religion in Western countries?


How does the author of *Harp of Burma* compare and contrast compulsory military training in Japan and compulsory religious training in Burma in the discussion of what it means to be “advanced” and “modern”? What do the Japanese prisoners of war think about the notions of “civilized” and “uncivilized”?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 295–298

Why is Murakami critical of the relationship between religion and state seen in four events: (1) the ritual rebuilding of the Ise Shrine; (2) the proposed state administration of the Yasukuni Shrine; (3) the use of state funds for a Shinto ritual blessing a state building site;
and (4) the enshrining of a Self-Defense Force official against his widow’s wishes? Analyze each of these events and evaluate the author’s criticism.

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 298–304

How does Rohlen approach the “ideology” of a Japanese business? Describe the main features of the “entering-bank-ceremony.” Explain how this ceremony and the “major regularly scheduled ceremonies” of the bank are used to interpret the bank’s “ideology.” Summarize the author’s view of this ideology.


How does Kondo approach the relationship between men and machines as part of “traditional craftsmanship”? Describe the process of “humanizing the machine,” especially the role of *kami* and Shinto in this process. How does the author interpret this “Solidarity . . . created between men and the world, and between men and men”?

*Religion in the Japanese Experience*, pp. 308–312

How is Christmas practiced in Japan? What does Christmas mean in Japan? How is Japanese Christmas an attempt to “cope with modernity”?

**Summary**

At the end of this study of culture and religion in Japan, it may be useful to take stock of what you have learned and how your thinking has changed. Compare what you knew about Japan and its religion before reading these materials with what you know now. What was the most interesting new information you learned about the Japanese tradition?

Compare your general attitudes or opinions toward Japanese culture you had before this
course of study with those you have now. How has your thinking changed, and what persuaded you to change your thinking?

Most people outside Japan view the country in terms of its industrial achievements—cameras, electronics, and automobiles. How would you balance this industrial, technological, and commercial image of Japan with what you have learned about its distinctive culture?

How would you compare Japanese culture and religion with Western (or American) culture and religion? In the past, some Americans have thought that Japan should adopt Western customs, such as Christianity and democracy; some Americans have claimed recently that Americans should adopt Japanese customs, such as greater cooperation between labor and management, and better coordination of business and government. Do you think it is possible for one society to borrow from another society, and if so, how would you select the features to be borrowed? Are there ethical or humanitarian principles that transcend individual cultures and should guide all cultures? How would you like to see the Japanese tradition develop in the future?