

Religion 202. Question sheet 8: Religions of Japan

NOTE: Please answer with schematic overviews, NOT in full sentences.

Please do not type, but hand-write your answer

Fact, Comparison, and Text Analysis Questions to study for the exam (required)

1. What are the four major Asian religions in Japan, when did they first reach Japan and from where, and what function do they serve for the Japanese believer?
2. A. Analyze the name Shinto pointing out the significance of the term and the misleading denominator “indigenous religion of Japan.” B. sketch briefly the historical evolution of Shinto throughout Japanese history.
3. Analyze the texts of the Kojiki and Nihongi you read, singling out A. elements that link the mythology with Shinto ritual; B. evidence of the political agenda behind the texts.
4. A. Briefly outline the main shifts in focus in Buddhism as it evolves from the early period (including Nara), through the Heian, and Kamakura period. B. Illustrate the developments during these two last periods by giving a complete overview of the schools that flourished then (give main tenet of the school, as well as founder and date of origin). C. Illustrate the main characteristics of the Kamakura period by means of the example of the scriptures you read from the Sōtō school.
5. Outline briefly the general characteristics of New Religious Movements in Japan, illustrating with the example of one or two sects of your choice.

Discussion questions (optional)

1. Would you say it is more accurate to say that Buddhism conquered Japan or Japan thoroughly rethought Buddhism? Give arguments pro and con each point of view, referring to what you have learned about the history of Buddhism in Japan.
2. Compare the political role played by Buddhism in China and Japan. Do you see significant differences? Would you say Buddhism and Daoism are more protest religions whereas Confucianism and Shinto are more establishment religions? Back your answer up with references to doctrine and praxis as well as the history of these religions.
3. Comparing the religions we have studied this quarter, how do you evaluate the position of women in different traditions? Does there seem to be link between worship of a feminine divine and high position of women in the society?
4. Scriptures from the religious traditions we have studied can be read as timeless reflections on the divine, but also as documents with “human fingerprints” all over. Illustrate with examples from East Asian scriptures you have read. What kind of reading do you prefer? Does one necessarily preclude the other?