

HIST 600: Religion and Politics in Japan
meets with RELI 400

Rulers have long used beliefs and rituals to support their regimes, yet today most constitutional regimes stipulate separation of church and state. But is it possible – or even desirable – to separate politics from religion? When is religion the same as culture? Are civic rituals religious?

In Japan, such questions pervade three current debates about the relationship between church and state:

- 1) What should be the future of the imperial house? (there is currently no male heir);
- 2) How should the war dead be remembered? (the prime minister's annual visits to Yasukuni Shrine regularly provoke protests not only within Japan but in China and Korea as well); and
- 3) What does it mean to be Japanese? (that is, what should be the basis of Japanese identity or pride in an increasingly international world?)

All of these issues are now coming to a head in the emerging debate over revising the Japanese constitution, written in 1946 under the guidance of the American Occupation. Just this last November (2005), the ruling Liberal Democratic Party approved a draft constitution that not only expands the roles of the emperor and the military but also allows the state to engage in religious activity "in cases within the boundary of social customs."

In this seminar, we will examine how and why these issues have emerged as central to Japanese political debate. First, we will focus on the development of Shinto (the "Way of the Gods") as a support for the ancient imperial house and, later, other regimes (including the modern Japanese state). Then we will address the adoption of the constitutional idea of religious freedom and its application in Japan from 1874 until today. Finally, we will end the semester with a student conference in which students will present and comment upon their research findings.

Course Requirements:

- 1) Attendance and Participation.
- 2) One 2-page position paper and three 5-sentence position statements.
For each of four weeks during the middle of the semester, we will debate a statement – e.g., "Shinto is not a religion." Based on the assigned readings for the class, two students will each write a 2-page paper supporting this statement, while another two students will write papers against this statement. They will post these papers by midnight on the Friday before class. All other members of the class will read these papers (in addition to

the week's readings), then write a 5-sentence position statement either for or against the statement. These statements will serve as the starting point for classroom discussion.

- 3) One 12- to 15-page research paper on a topic of your choice related to the subject of religion and politics in Japan. An outline and rough draft will also be required.
- 4) 10-minute conference presentation of your paper.
- 5) Performance as panel discussant on a conference panel.

NOTE: The conference will occur during the last four weeks of class. This means that there is a 50% chance that your conference presentation or turn as panel discussant will occur on the Monday immediately after Thanksgiving break. In order to ease the burden on this half of the class, **rough drafts of papers will be due at least two weeks before Thanksgiving break**, so be prepared to do the bulk of your research at the end of October and beginning of November.