

Timeline Assignment

As you'll soon discover, this course is not arranged chronologically. For example, we will read ancient Japanese myths and then consider controversies regarding religion and war memory in modern Japan. We will explore the practices of medieval monks alongside those of contemporary communities. This approach risks creating confusion, since we will frequently move back and forth across centuries of data. But it also promises to illuminate continuities and ruptures that we may not otherwise uncover in a more straightforwardly organized course.

This timeline assignment aims to alleviate confusion by providing you with a note keeping system, as well as shed light on a particular approach to the academic study of religion. For one, in completing the assignment, you will create a resource that will help you remember dates, historical developments, names of individuals, and titles of texts. You will develop a tool that provides a chronological order to a syllabus that resists it. It's worth noting that this tool will help you study for your final exam. Second, the timeline will invite you to think about the relationship between history and religion. While some scholars as well as many religious practitioners posit religious truths as timeless, our class will historicize religion to see the ways human actors invoke truth claims in particular times and places. The tool, therefore, reflects the method of the class.

Overview

Every student in the class will create a timeline using the online system of Tiki-toki (<http://www.tiki-toki.com>). I have created a "Teacher Account" for our class that will allow you to participate free of charge. You will need to enter the following code to access this account: 611227-983874258

You should set up your account before class on Friday January 15. We will collectively troubleshoot any problems on Friday. Your timeline should contain a minimum of the following four categories: 1) People, 2) Texts, 3) Beliefs and Practices, and 4) Historical Context (this final category should focus especially on less explicitly religious themes such as political and economic developments). You are also encouraged to add more categories as you see fit over the semester. More instructions for how to set-up your timeline can be found at the end of this assignment.

After setting up your timeline, you will write at least four entries each week by Friday at 9 AM (note that in order to complete 60 entries for full credit, you will need to do more than four in some weeks). Each entry should be a minimum of three sentences. It should also include media in the form of images, maps, or other media as much as possible (at least 75% of entries for full credit). In addition, you will deliver one short presentation in class on your timeline (sign-up sheet to be circulated in week two). Finally, you will write a four to five-page paper on an assigned or freely designed question (see below) that relates to the general goals of the timeline assignment. More specific expectations for each of these elements appear below.

Assessment

The timeline assignment constitutes 50% of your final grade. It is divided into three inter-related activities, including the timeline itself (25% of final grade), a presentation (5%), and a paper (20%).

Timeline Construction: 25 points total (15 points x 1 point per week and 10 points on overall quality of timeline)

You can earn one point per week for regularly working on your timeline. For the first week, you will get credit for simply setting up a timeline (you do not need to record entries). For weeks two through fourteen, you need to include at least four entries each week to earn the point. For week fifteen, you are expected to edit and polish your timeline to prepare it for its final grade. Simply completing these activities will give you full credit for 15 points.

In addition, you will be assessed on the overall quality of your timeline based on the following criteria: number of entries (at least 60 total for full credit), accuracy, depth, use of media, quality of writing, and citations. For each entry, ask yourself the following questions: Am I accurately reporting information? Does my entry contain at least three substantial sentences that focus on the most important information for a given topic? Do I use media such as images when appropriate? Do I write clearly with active verbs and proper grammar? Do I cite my work with simple parenthetical citations (ex. *RJP*, 206; Teeuwen and Breen, 25; or lecture notes 1/13/2016)?

You will receive brief written comments twice during the semester: first in week six and again in week twelve. Your qualitative grade is based on the state of your project on Monday April 25 at the start of class, so you are encouraged to revise based on these comments.

Presentations: 5 points total

Starting in week three, one to two students will deliver short presentations (5 minutes maximum) of some new entries for that week (typically but not always on Friday). Your presentation should summarize your entries and explain any patterns that you can see when you think about your entries chronologically. It should also use your timeline to raise a discussion question. You will be assessed on the following:

- ability to make connections across entries: 1 point
- clarity of presentation: 1 point
- ability to follow the five minute time limit (not going over or under by more than one minute): 1 point
- engaging (not monotone, eye contact, etc.): 1 point
- quality of the question that you raised (we will discuss what makes a good question in class): 1 point

Paper: 20 points total

A 4-5 page paper will be due on April 18th at 11:59 PM. In addition, you should include a one-paragraph post-script (not counted in the 4-5 page total) that explains how your timeline helped you with your assignment.

The paper will ask you to think historically. To help you think about these papers from early on, I've outlined four preliminary versions of questions you can choose from below (these may change slightly). All papers should use at least one primary and one secondary source and engage materials from multiple weeks of the syllabus. A detailed grading rubric and assignment will be distributed later in the semester.

- 1) Assess the following statement: Shintō is Japan's indigenous tradition that can be traced back to some of the earliest written sources, such as the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. Your essay should take a stand on one side or the other, or give a succinctly stated case for a middle ground. Along the way, your essay should define Shintō and make an argument for when it first emerged. You should use examples from the readings to support your case.
- 2) In the Kamakura period, many individuals such as Hōnen, Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren began advocating a single and often simple practice as the means to enlightenment. We also saw how medieval mountain ascetic practitioners engaged in extreme practices to attain liberation as part of a movement that eventually became known as Shugendō. Assess the following statement: the doctrines and practices associated with one of the thinkers and movements listed above depart significantly from mainstream forms of medieval Japanese Buddhism such as Tendai and Esoteric Buddhism that originated in earlier periods. Take a side that either supports the above statement or critiques it. Focus your discussion on one thinker or movement and compare it with Tendai and/or Esoteric Buddhism.
- 3) We have looked at a number of controversies in modern Japanese religions such as those relating to Yasukuni Shrine, *mizuko kuyō*, the Aum Shinrikyō Sarin gas attack, the issue of "funeral Buddhism," and the religious response to the 3/11 disaster. Are these purely modern phenomena or do they have a historical connection to pre-1868 beliefs and practices?
- 4) Design your own research question. Please be sure to consult with me well in advance before you begin a paper on a self-designed topic.

A few pointers for setting up tiki-toki:

- 1) Start by going to <http://www.tiki-toki.com/>
- 2) Click on “Free Sign Up” in the top right and provide a user name, email, and password. Be sure to enter the class code: 611227-983874258. If you are concerned about privacy, you are welcome to use a pseudonym; just let me know what it is.
- 3) Give your timeline a title. Set a start date of Jan. 1 10,000 BCE and an end date of May 2, 2016. You can add images, etc. now or later. Once you are satisfied, click “Create New Timeline”
- 4) Under Admin in the top right, click “Categories” and “Create New Category.” Add the following four categories: 1) People, 2) Texts, 3) Beliefs and Practices, and 4) Historical Context. You may want to add more as the semester progresses.
- 5) From week two, you will need to start adding entries. You can do this by clicking “Stories” and “Create New Story.” Give your story a title, a start and end date (as close as you can, but focus on years rather than days and months), and write your three or more sentences under intro. Provide a category.
- 6) To add media to a story, click “Media” and “Add New Media.” To add an image, set the type to “Image” and enter a URL. You can find links for places to find images on Blackboard under “Helpful Links.” Be sure to only use sources in the public domain and to openly acknowledge your source in the caption. For Maps, follow the following instructions courtesy of tiki-toki troubleshooting:

Create a new media item for a story, and choose the map option from the drop down menu. Now enter the url of the map into the media source field and also a caption, if you wish.

- 1) Open in the browser <https://www.bing.com/maps/>
- 2) Navigate to the location you want on the map
- 3) Click on the Share option at the top right of the screen
- 4) Click customize and preview, and choose custom size
- 5) Enter width: 248 and height: 306
- 6) Click generate code
- 7) Now you need to extract the url in the src of the iframe in the embed code. It will look something like the following:
<https://www.bing.com/maps/embed/viewer.aspx?v=3&cp=51.515499~-0.093600&lvl=6&w=500&h=400&sty=r&typ=d&pp=&ps=&dir=0&mkt=en-gb&src=SHELL&form=BMEMJS>
- 8) This is the url you will enter into the media source field in tiki-toki. Please note that our system cannot accept urls that are longer than 255 characters. So you may need to use a url shortener to get within the 255 char limit

As an alternative to this method, you can embed a larger map within the text of a story as follows: Firstly, you should set HTML formatting to "on" in the Advanced Settings panel (accessible from the Settings tab). You should then go to google maps, search for the location you want, and then grab the embed code that Google provides. You should then copy that embed code into the Extra Info field for a story. You may want to change the iFrame width attribute to 100% to fit the space.