

# Religious Visual Culture of Japan

Mondays & Thursdays 1:10-2:40

## Instructor

Hillary Pedersen

## Inquiries

Email questions to [hpedersen405@gmail.com](mailto:hpedersen405@gmail.com)

## Themes and goals

Visual culture is best understood as a way of studying societies and cultures through images, rather than words. This course explores how sculpture, painting, architecture, ritual objects, prints, and contemporary media relate to different forms of practice and belief in Japan. We will study the iconography, formal characteristics, functions, and the sacred nature of Buddhist and Shinto visual culture through weekly readings and site visits. Emphasis is placed upon developing students' knowledge of religious signifiers, visual analysis skills, as well as helping them understand visual culture in its physical, historical, ritual, and social context. The theme of cross-cultural exchange will be ever-present in lectures, as well as in the writing assignments and discussions that reinforce course content. The course will incorporate visits to significant religious sites in Kyoto, as well as the viewing of rituals and other events when possible.

## Texts

All readings will be provided by the instructor.

## Grading

- 20% Participation and attendance
- 30% Six site visit response papers (approx. 700 words). You are required to attend all seven scheduled site visits, but only need to submit response papers for six of those sites (KNM response paper is required).
- 40% One final presentation (5-10 minutes) and report (1500 words) on a topic of your choosing. Details will be explained in class.

90-100% = A range (excellent)

80-80% = B range (good)

70-79% = C range (fair)

60-69% = D range (barely satisfactory)

Below 60 = F (unsatisfactory)

## Attendance Policy

It is to your benefit to attend all lectures and site visits. Missing two classes (lectures or site visits) without an appropriate reason will automatically drop your attendance grade by one full letter grade; egregious tardiness (three or more) will yield the same penalty. Four unexcused absences from lectures or recitations over the semester will result in the participation grade turning to zero. I reserve the right to give pop quizzes or assign additional work if people are coming to class unprepared. If you are ill or have a personal emergency, you must provide acceptable documentation in order to be excused.

Tardiness is not accepted in this class. If you are 10 minutes late to class three times, it will count as one absence.

### Missed assignments

Scores of late assignments will automatically be reduced by 15% for each day late. If you miss an assignment, it is your responsibility to consult with me about a make-up or late submission. Arrangements will be made on a case-by-case basis.

### Structure of the class

This class is comprised of in-class lectures on specific topics related to Japanese religion and visual culture, as well as site visits that will allow you to see objects and practices that you have learned about. I would like to give you as much time as possible at the sites; therefore, we may have to assemble a bit prior to the actual class time (1:10) in order for all students to make it on time to the next class (which begins at 2:55).

### Participation

This class will include discussion of relevant topics, and you will be evaluated on the quality, rather than the quantity, of the responses. One helpful comment or question is more valuable than talking for talking's sake.

### Classroom policies

Use of technology in the classroom should be limited to the topic at hand.

Please come to class prepared, on time, and ready to participate.

Do not bring food or drink into the classroom.

Do not read outside reading material during class time.

Do not sleep in class.

Please follow proper email etiquette when contacting your instructor.

Please follow proper etiquette when visiting sites.

### Academic misconduct

I do not tolerate plagiarism (盗用), cheating, or helping others to cheat. Plagiarism is defined as misrepresenting the work of others (whether published or not) as your own. Any facts, statistics, quotations or paraphrasing of any information that is not common knowledge should be cited.

Any instances of plagiarism or cheating will result in an automatic failing grade in the course.

For more information on paper writing, including how to avoid plagiarism and how to use citations, check the Columbia University website and others:

[https://guides.library.columbia.edu/columbia\\_university\\_buildings/citing\\_sources](https://guides.library.columbia.edu/columbia_university_buildings/citing_sources)

## Tentative Schedule

(subject to change)

All readings are mandatory and should be completed by the date under which they appear.

### Week 1 Course introduction

1/16 Course introduction

1/19 Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), pp. 134-167.

Tomoe Irene Maria Steineck, Martina Wernsdorfer, Raji C. Steineck, eds., *Tokens of the Path: Japanese Devotional and Pilgrimage Images* (Stuttgart, Zürich: Arnoldsche Art Publishers: Völkerkundemuseum der Universität, 2014), pp. 14-23.

S. Brent Plate, "Introduction," in S. Brent Plate, ed., *Religion, Art and Visual Culture: a Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 6-12.

### Week 2 Visual Culture of Shrines: Power and Prayer

1/23 **Site visit # 1: Kamigamo Jinja (meet at 12:15)**

John Nelson, *Enduring Identities: the Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), Ch. 3

(Suggested) John Dougill, *Shinto Shrines: a Guide to the Sacred Sites of Japan's Ancient Religion* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), pp. 29-51.

1/26 **Site visit response paper #1 due**

*Kami*-related visual culture, con't.

### Week 3 Visual Culture of Shrines: Celestial Bodies and Celebrations

1/30 Lucia Dolce, "The Worship of Celestial Bodies in Japan: Politics, Rituals and Icons," *Culture and Cosmos: A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy* (Vol. 1, No. 1 and 2, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter) 2006, pp. 3-45.

2/2 **Site visit #2 to Kitano Tenmangu for *setsubun* and Taishogun Jinja (meet at 12:30)**

Ikumi Kaminishi, "The Political Culture of a Scroll: Jien's Appropriation of Kitano Tenjin," *Ars Orientalis* Vol. 44, 2014, pp. 111-133.

### Week 4 Visual Culture of Buddhism

2/6 **Site visit response paper #2 due**

Denise Patry Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2008), pp. 1-5.

2/9 James Dobbins, *Behold the Buddha: Religious Meanings of Japanese Religious Icons* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), pp. 25-74.

Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime and Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), pp. 103-24.

**Site visit #3 will be an independent trip to Kyoto National Museum between 2/9 and 3/5 (free admission with student card). Response paper due one week after your visit.** In

preparation, please read Pamela Winfield, "Curating Culture: The Secularization of Buddhism through Museum Display," Richard K. Payne, ed., *Secularizing Buddhism: New Perspectives on a Dynamic Tradition* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2021), pp. 95-114.

### **Week 5 Visual Culture of Esoteric Buddhism**

- 2/13 Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), pp. 1-9, 78-95.
- 2/16 Katonah Museum of Art, Anne Nishimura Morse, Samuel Morse, eds., *Object as Insight*, pp. 26-31, 34-47.

### **Week 6 Visual Culture of Buddhist Ritual**

- 2/20 **Site visit #4 to Tōji (meet at 12:25, 2:00PM ritual viewing?)**  
Sylvan Barnett and William Burto, "Thinking About Buddhist Ritual Objects," *Orientalism* 35:1 (Jan./Feb. 2004), pp. 67-69.  
Cynthia Bogel, *With a Single Glance: Buddhist Icon and Early Mikkyō Vision* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), pp. 278-337.
- 2/23 NO CLASSES (national holiday)

### **Week 7 Buddhist Visual Culture and Replication**

- 2/27 **Site visit response paper #4 due**
- 3/2 **Site visit #5 to Sanjusangendō (meet at 11:55)**  
Sherry Fowler, *Accounts and Images of Six Kannon in Japan* (Honolulu, 2016), pp. 216-268.

### **Week 8 The Lives of Buddhist Sculptures**

- 3/6 **Site visit response paper #5 due**  
Samuel Morse, "Revealing the Unseen: The Master Sculptor Unkei and the Meaning of Dedicatory Objects in Kamakura-Period Sculpture," *Impressions* (no. 31) 2010, pp. 25-41.
- 3/9 Helmut Brinker, *Secrets of the Sacred: Empowering Buddhist Images in Clear, in Code, and in Cache* (Lawrence, KS and Seattle: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas and University of Washington, 2011), pp. 3-50.

### **Week 9 The Lives of Buddhist Sculptures con't.**

- 3/13 Hank Glassman, "Softening their Light, Mingling with the Dust," Ivo Covachi, ed, *Kamakura: Realism and Spirituality in the Sculpture of Japan* (New York, New Haven: Asia Society and Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 26-35.
- 3/16 **Site visit #6 to Miyamoto Kōgei Buddhist sculpture studio (meet at 12:00)**

### **Week 10 Zen Visual Culture**

- 3/20 NO CLASS
- 3/23 **Site visit #6 response paper due**  
Readings TBA

### **Week 11 Zen Visual Culture con't. and Popular Deities**

- 3/27 **Site visit #7 to Myoshinji (meet at 12:00)**  
Jørn Borup, *Japanese Rinzai Buddhism: Myoshinji, a Living Religion* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 186-204.

3/30 **Site visit # 7 response paper due**

Tomoe Irene Maria Steineck, Martina Wernsdorfer, Raji C. Steineck, eds., *Tokens of the Path: Japanese Devotional and Pilgrimage Images*, pp. 34-53.

**Week 12 Popular Deities**

4/3 Patricia Graham, *Faith and Power in Japanese Buddhist Art, 1600-1900* (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), pp. 96-126.

4/6 Rajyashree Pandey, "Medieval Genealogies of Manga and Anime Horror" in *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 219-236.

**Week 13**

4/10 Presentations

4/13 Presentations

4/19 final paper due