

Religious Visual Culture of Japan

Thursdays 1:10-4:25

Instructor

Hillary Pedersen

Inquiries

Email questions to hpedersen405@gmail.com

Themes and goals

Visual culture is best understood as a way of studying societies and cultures through images, rather than words. It is an investigation into the lives of images, and focuses on subjects, rather than objects. 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 sites and events in Kyoto with significant relevance to Japanese religious culture.

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.
- 20% Final presentation (5-10 minutes) on a topic of your choosing.
- 30% Research paper (1500 words) on your final presentation topic. 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. If you will be late or absent, contact me (not your classmates) as soon as possible. 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 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 sites, objects, and practices that you have learned about. Some classes will be devoted to in-class activities, some to site visits, and some will be a combination of both (i.e. a 45-minute in-class lecture followed by a site visit).

Site visit response papers

Out of the seven site visits, you are required to submit a 700-word response paper on six of them. I will provide some writing prompts to guide you, but your papers should synthesize information from in-class lectures, discussion, readings, and what you saw and experienced at the site. Each response paper must have an introduction, body, and conclusion, and include references to **at least two** of the required class readings. I require correct citation format based on the Chicago Manual of Style using the “Notes and Bibliography Style.” For more information see: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Please submit only Microsoft Word documents, not pdfs.

Participation

This class will include discussion (both in class and on-site visits) 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

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

Please follow proper protocol and manners when visiting sites.

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

Do not bring food or drink into the classroom (drinks with lids are OK).

Do not sleep in class.

Please follow proper email etiquette when contacting your instructor. **Always sign your emails with your first and last name.** I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours.

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.

The use of AI chatbots/virtual assistants such as Chat GPT to assist in your writing is prohibited; 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

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
Walking tour of nearby Go-o Jinja

Week 2 Visual Culture of Shrines: Power and Prayer

1/23 **Site visit # 1: Kamigamo Jinja (meet at 12:50 in front of classroom)**
Raji Steineck, "Religion in Japan: One, Many, or None?" in Tomoe Irene Maria Steineck, Martina Wernsdorfer, Raji C. Steineck, eds., *Tokens of the Path: Japanese Devotional and Pilgrimage Images* (Arnoldsche Art Publishers: Völkerkundemuseum der Universität, 2014), pp. 14-23.
John Nelson, *Enduring Identities: the Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), Ch. 3.

Return to Doshisha for in-class discussion

Week 3 Visual Culture of Shrines: Celestial Bodies and Celebrations

1/30 **Site visit response paper #1 due**

In-class lecture

Site visit #2 to Kitano Tenmangu and Taishogun Jinja

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

Week 4 Introduction to the Visual Culture of Buddhism

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

In-class lecture

Denise Patry Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism* (Shambhala Publications, 2008), pp. 1-5.
James Dobbins, *Behold the Buddha: Religious Meanings of Japanese Religious Icons* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), pp. 25-74.

Week 5 Visual Culture of Buddhism (con't.)

2/13 **In-class lecture and activity**
Bernard Faure, *Gods of Medieval Japan, vol. 1, The Fluid Pantheon* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), pp. 115-166.
Katonah Museum of Art, Anne Nishimura Morse, Samuel Morse, eds., *Object as Insight* (Katonah Museum of Art, 1995), pp. 26-31, 34-47.

Week 6 Esoteric Buddhist Ritual and Visuality

2/20 Site visit #3 to Daigoji

Sylvan Barnett and William Burto, "Thinking About Buddhist Ritual Objects," *Orientalism* 35:1 (Jan./Feb. 2004), pp. 67-69.

2/27 SPRING BREAK (no class)

Week 7 Visual Culture of Pure Land Buddhism

3/6 Site visit response paper #3 due

Site Visit #4 Byodoin in Uji (meet at 12:50)

Mimi Yiengpruksawan, "A Pavilion for Amitabha: Yorimichi's Phoenix Hall in Transcultural Perspective, in Victor Mair, ed., *Buddhist Transformations and Interactions* (Cambria Press, 2017), 401-516.

Week 8 Religious Visual Culture and Museums

3/13 Site visit response paper #4 due

In-class lecture

Site visit #5 Kyoto National Museum (free admission with student card).

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

3/20 National Holiday NO CLASS

Week 9 Religious Imagery and Popular Culture

3/27 Site visit #5 response paper due

Site visit #6 to the studio of painter Yamamoto Taro (Kyoto Arts and Crafts University)

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

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

Week 10 Zen Visual Culture

4/3 Site visit #6 response paper due AND Final Project Proposal due

In-class lecture

Yukio Lippit, "Awakenings: the Development of the Zen Figural Pantheon," in Gregory P. Levine and Yukio Lippit, eds., *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan* (Japan Society, 2007), pp. 34-51.

Gregory P. Levine, *Long Strange Journey: On Modern Zen, Zen Art, and Other Predicaments* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), pp. 75-96.

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

4/10 **Site visit #7 to Myoshinji**

Jørn Borup, *Japanese Rinzai Buddhism: Myoshinji, a Living Religion* (Brill, 2008), pp. 186-204.

Week 12 Popular Deities

4/17 **Site visit # 7 response paper due**

In-class lecture

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

Week 13

4/24 Presentations