

# Religious Visual Culture of Japan

## Instructor

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## Inquiries

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## 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)

80-89% = 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 one 700-word response paper for 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](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

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. **Always sign your emails with your first and last name.** I may not be able to immediately respond to emails, but I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours.

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.

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](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 a nearby temple and/or shrine

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

- 1/23 **In-class lecture**  
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: Völkermuseum 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.

**Site visit # 1: Kamigamo Jinja**

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

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

**In-class lecture**

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.

**Site visit #2 to Kitano Tenmangu and Taishogun Jinja**

### **Week 4 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 Buddhist Images and Museums**

- 2/13 **Site visit #3 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.

### **Week 6 Esoteric Buddhist Visual Culture**

- 2/20 **Site visit response paper #3 due**

**Site visit #4 to Daigoji**

Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), pp. 1-9, 78-95.

Bernard Faure, *Gods of Medieval Japan, vol. 1, The Fluid Pantheon* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), pp. 115-166.

**2/27 SPRING BREAK (no class)**

**Week 7 Visual Culture of Buddhist Ritual**

3/6 Site visit response paper #4 due

**In-class lecture**

Katonah Museum of Art, Anne Nishimura Morse, Samuel Morse, eds., *Object as Insight* (Katonah Museum of Art, 1995), pp. 26-31, 34-47.

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

**Week 8 Pure Land Buddhist Visual Culture**

3/13 In-class lecture

Readings TBD

Site visit #5 to Chion-in

**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 artist's studio (details TBD)**

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

**In-class lecture**

Pamela D. Winfield and Steven Heine, eds., *Zen and Material Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2017) pp. TBD.

**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.

Steineck, Wernsdorfer, Steineck, eds., *Tokens of the Path: Japanese Devotional and Pilgrimage Images*, pp. 34-53.

**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