

# Religious Visual Culture of Japan

Thursdays 1:10-4:25

## Instructor

Hillary Pedersen

## Inquiries

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

## Themes of the course

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 first, and their materiality second. This course explores how ideas related to religious belief and practice are made manifest in Japanese visual media such as sculpture, painting, architecture, ritual objects, prints, anime, and manga. The course begins with an introduction to the basic tenets of Japanese religion in tandem with its visual incarnations, investigating the iconography, formal characteristics, functions, and the sacred nature of Buddhist and Shinto subjects and objects. We will then explore how historical developments in religious visual culture have altered how such images and themes are perceived. Examination of religious imagery in contemporary media such as manga, anime and video games is woven throughout all units of the course, and students are encouraged to synthesize and contextualize their own knowledge of such media with new content learned in the course's weekly readings, lectures, and site visits. We will take advantage of the fall festival season and visit temples and shrines in Kyoto so that students can observe first-hand interactions between religious visual culture and contemporary belief and practice.

## Course goals

Through this course students will develop and sharpen visual analysis skills, gain knowledge of religious signifiers, and deepen their understanding of Japanese religious visual culture in its historical, ritual, and social context. It is hoped that these skills will enable students to engage with religious visual culture as they explore Japan during the program and beyond.

## Texts

All readings will be provided by the instructor.

## Grading

- 15% Attendance and participation
- 10% Five in-class quizzes
- 25% Five out of six possible site visit response papers (approx. 700 words)
- 20% Final presentation (5-10 minutes) on a topic of your choosing
- 30% Research paper (1500-2000 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 two times, it will count as one absence.

### Missed assignments

Scores of late assignments will automatically be reduced by 5% 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. Make-up quizzes will not be offered.

### 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 through lectures and readings. 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

This course requires one 700-word response paper for five out of the six site visits. You will receive a rubric and some writing prompts to guide you; the 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. Please use the 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. I encourage you to take notes by hand, rather than on a digital device.

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

Do not bring food or drinks into the classroom, especially tuna sandwiches or Doritos.

Do not read outside reading material during class time.

Get enough sleep so that you are not tempted to 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 Integrity

As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited. In practical terms, this means that, as students, all work submitted in this course, whether in draft or final form, must be your own. You must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent. Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated.

### Use of Generative AI

Absent a clear statement from a course instructor granting permission, the use of Generative AI tools to complete an assignment or exam is prohibited. The unauthorized use of AI shall be treated similarly to unauthorized assistance and/or plagiarism page 11 of Standards and Discipline at <https://universitypolicies.columbia.edu/content/standards-and-discipline>.

### Policy

KCJS expects all KCJS community members to follow these guidelines when using Generative AI tools for teaching and learning, research, and work-related functions.

1. I do not input Confidential Information;
2. I do not input Personal Information;
3. I do not input information that violates IP or general contract terms and conditions;
4. I confirm the accuracy of the output provided by Generative AI tools;
5. I check the output of Generative AI tools for bias;
6. I disclose the use of Generative AI tools;
7. I comply with third-party intellectual property rights.

For more detailed information, please refer to the following page.

<https://provost.columbia.edu/content/office-senior-vice-provost/ai-policy>

## Tentative Schedule

(subject to change)

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

### Week 1 Course introduction

9/10 Course introduction (visual culture basics, intro to Japanese religion, and syllabus)  
Tour of nearby Shinto shrine

### Week 2 Visual Culture of Shinto: Myth and Practice

9/17 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: 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.

**Site visit # 1: Kamigamo Jinja**

### Week 3 Visual Culture of Buddhism: Introduction

9/24 Site visit response paper #1 due

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.

**Quiz #1**

**Introduce Final Project**

### Week 4 Visual Culture of Shinto: Celebrations

10/1 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.

Other reading TBA

**Site visit #2 to Kitano Tenmangu Shrine for Zuiki Matsuri Procession**

### Week 5 Visual Culture of Buddhism: Rituals, Objects, and Display

10/8 Site visit response paper #2 due

Anne Nishimura Morse and Samuel Morse, "Introduction," in Katonah Museum of Art, Anne Nishimura Morse, Samuel Morse, eds., *Object as Insight* (Katonah Museum of Art, 1995), pp. 26-31, and James H. Foard, "Ritual in the Buddhist Temples of Japan," *Object as Insight*, pp. 34-47.

**Quiz #2**

**Introduction to Site visit #3, to be completed by 11/23 (independent visit to Ryukoku Museum exhibition on Buddhist images from Fumonji Temple; details TBA)**

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 Visual Culture of Buddhism: Esoteric Schools**

### **10/15 Site visit #4 to Toji**

Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), pp. 78-95, and skim introduction pp. 1-12.

Bernard Faure, *Gods of Medieval Japan, vol. 1, The Fluid Pantheon* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), pp. 115-142 and skim pp. 143-166.

## **Week 7 Visual Culture of Buddhism: Pure Land Schools**

### **10/22 Site visit #4 response paper due**

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 (especially 401-412 and 469-485).

### **Quiz #3**

## **Week 8 Visual Culture of Buddhism: Pure Land Schools**

### **10/29 Site visit #5 to Byōdōin**

### **Final Project Proposal due**

### **FALL BREAK 11/6 no class**

## **Week 9 Visual Culture of Buddhism: Zen Schools**

### **11/12 Site visit #5 response paper due**

Martin Colcutt, "Zen Art in a Monastic Context: Zen and the Arts in Medieval Kenchōji," in Gregory P. Levine and Yukio Lippit, eds., *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan* (Japan Society, 2007), 34-51.

### **Quiz #4**

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

### **11/19 Site visit #6 to Myōshinji**

Jørn Borup, *Japanese Rinzai Buddhism: Myōshinji, a Living Religion* (Brill, 2008), 7-48.

Joshua A. Irizarry, "Signs of Life: Grounding the Transcendent in Japanese Memorial Objects," *Signs and Society*, Vol. 2, No. S1 (Supplement 2014), pp. 160-187.

## **Week 11 Popular Deities**

### **11/26 Site visit #6 response paper due**

### **In-class lecture and activity**

## **Week 12 Popular Deities**

### **12/3 In-class lecture and activity**

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

### **Quiz #5**

## **Week 13**

### **12/10 Presentations (5-7 minutes)**

Final papers due **Wednesday, Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>, 5PM**