JASP 5060B Japanese Religions in an East Asian Context
Shea Ingram
Spring 2019, Saturdays 10:00am-12:30pm

Learning Activities:
(1) Lecture/class discussions: 2.5 hrs. per week, mandatory, in class
(2) Videos and reading: approximately 3 hrs. per week, mandatory, outside of class
(3) Essays: one short essay (4-5 pages) and one research essay (8-10 pages), mandatory, outside of class

Academic Integrity: Any work you submit must be your original work. Writing or ideas borrowed from other scholars, students, journalists, or publications must be clearly recognizable as such in your assignments per standard rules of citation. If you have any questions about rules regarding plagiarism or citation, you should ask the instructor before submitting your first assignment. For more information, see http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academicihonesty/.

Assignments and Grading:
Take-home midterm: 40%
Final Essay: 40%
Class participation: 20%

Take-home midterm: For the exam, you will be asked to answer 2 or 3 questions and be given 7 days. The questions will cover lectures and assigned reading material. The questions are designed to allow you to discuss the issues we have covered in the course. The answers should integrate specific examples from the readings, videos and lectures to support your points.

Final Essay: For the long essay, 8-10 pages in length, students will research a topic of their choosing related to Japanese culture or society. The topic must be approved by the instructor in advance. The essay will be evaluated based on (a) the quality of students’ research, and (b) their ability to create a clear thesis and supporting argument. More guidance will be provided regarding the long essay during class sessions.

For those who would prefer not to write a research essay, take-home questions similar to the format of the midterm will be arranged.


Week 1: Introduction and Buddhism as Idea: What core concepts, such as “emptiness,” “Two-truth Theory,” and the “Fourfold Noble Path,” are common to Buddhist traditions? How did the Mahāyāna idea of the “bodhisattva” differ from earlier forms of Buddhism?

Topics: Philosophical underpinnings of Buddhism; Mahayana vs. Theravada Buddhism
Other: Mitchell, “Introducing the Buddhist Experience,” Ch. 3.

Week 2: Buddhist Scripture: What literary devices, such as simile and parable, are central to Mahāyāna literature? What is the role of “skillful means”? How do these literary and conceptual developments compare with early Buddhist texts?

Topics: Literary forms and devices used in Buddhist texts; “skillful means” as a core Buddhist concept

Other: Mitchell, “Introducing the Buddhist Experience,” Ch. 4.


Week 3: Human Relations as Ritual: What is the role of the “holy rite” or “sacred ceremony” within the Analects? Can Confucianism simultaneously be religious and humanistic?

Topics: Confucianism as an ethical philosophy vs. a religion and the development of Neo-Confucianism from the Song Dynasty


Week 4: The Daoist Body: How did Daoism evolve from a political philosophy to a method of internal cultivation? How was the body envisioned as a territory governed by a divine bureaucracy for meditative purposes?

Topics: Development of Daoism from a political philosophy to a method for individual spiritual development

**Week 5: Empty Mind:** How did Chan/Zen present itself as a “special transmission outside the scriptures”? What are “kōan” (public cases), and how are they used to instruct students?

**Topics:** Chan Buddhism vs. earlier forms of Buddhism; the politics of religious sectarianism


**Other:** Cook, Francis Dojun, ed. *How To Raise an Ox: Zen Practice as Taught in Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo*, p. 69-89.


**Week 6: The World as Religious Text:** How does Esoteric Buddhism use mantra (chants), mudra (gestures), and mandala (visualization) to theorize Buddhist practice as a form of communication?

**Topics:** Esoteric Buddhism and Japanese religious syncretism


**Other:** Ibid. “Essentials of Kūkai’s Esoteric Buddhist Thought and Practice,” p. 76-100.


[Part 2: East Asian Religions in Practice]

**Week 7: The Silk Road and the Spread of Buddhism to Korea:** By what means did Buddhism spread from China to neighboring countries on the Korean peninsula? What sorts of indigenous religions did Buddhism encounter there?

**Topics:** The history of the spread of religion along trade routes in East Asia


Whitfield, Susan, “The Monk’s Tale.” *Life along the Silk Road*, p. 113-137.


**Week 8: Challenges to Mainstream Japanese Religion:** How and why did the medieval Pure Land movements in Japan segregate themselves from mainstream Buddhist thought and
practice? How does Japanese “sectarianism” differ from more pluralistic approaches to Buddhism elsewhere in East Asia?

Topics: Mainstream vs. “heretical” forms of religion in Japan


Week 9: Warrior Dramas and the Way of the Samurai: How were Buddhist ideas central to the content and theories of Japanese medieval literature? How did Buddhist ideas become a basis for the conduct and morals of Japanese warriors (samurai)?

Topics: Religion as literary expression; Buddhism as a moral code for the behavior of the samurai.


Yamamoto Tsunetomo. Hagakure, Ch. 1 (handout).


Week 10: Chinese Religion as Communal Activity: How does popular religion in China today work to connect village temples that provide services, raise funds, and mobilize communities to participate in collective rituals, sometimes described as a “second government?”

Topics: Popular religion as practice outside the reach of institutions.


Dean, Kenneth. “Local Communal Religion in South-east China.” China Quarterly (https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S0009443903000214)

Chen, Nancy N. “Healing Sects and Anti-Cult Campaigns” China Quarterly (https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S0009443903000305)

Week 11: Buddhist Art and Architecture: How did Buddhism influence visual and material culture in East Asia in the realms of painting, garden design, and architecture?

Topics: The materiality of religion in construction of temples, painting, and gardens.


**Week 12: New Religions of Asia:** What are some of the newest religions in East Asia since the 19th c., particularly in Vietnam and Japan? How are they perceived, and what positive and negative impacts have they made on society? How have traditional religious institutions adapted to new religions’ widening influence?


**Topics:** The attraction of new religions vs. the “three teachings” in modern times.


**Week 13: Zen and the Western World / Conclusions:** How has East Asian religion impacted popular culture in the West? What are some of the pervasive images of Buddhism in Western literature and film?

**Topics:** The spread of East Asian Buddhism to the West


**Film:** *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*