

St. Lawrence University

REL3001 Japanese Buddhist Visual Culture

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Course Description



Designed by Kaori MacWilliams

This course explores the various ways visual culture is a key part of the Japanese Buddhist tradition. In this semester, we will explore the following topics: (1) Buddhist images and icon worship; (2) Buddhism in film; (3) Gardens; (5) *Raku* ware and the tea ceremony; (6) the *dōjō* space, meditation for imaging emptiness, and (7) the popular Buddhist cult of Jizō, an enlightened being who is worshipped to obtain spiritual benefits (*goriyaku*). This course is part of “Paths to the Buddha,” a group of collaborative courses being offered each semester exploring various Buddhist topics and themes, which is being supported by a generous grant from the Mellon Foundation.

This semester we are not just studying religious art, but what historian of religion, David Morgan, calls “religious visual culture.” This is a broad category that includes both high art and popular culture. So, we will be looking at famous national treasures like the Zen garden at Ryōanji temple in Kyoto, but also the more plebian *ema*, widely distributed votive prayer tablets that are produced and sold by temples and shrines throughout Japan. In today’s Japan, both are popular expressions of visual culture--Ryōanji has become a world famous tourist spot and *ema* are sold at every Japanese temple and shrine for parishioners who use them to post their prayers to the buddhas, bodhisattvas and the gods.

This gets to the key focus of this course, which is about the ways images are produced, viewed, and used within the Japanese tradition. Visual culture is far more than the study of objects set on pedestals or hanging from walls in a museum. Art “objects” live for the people who practice religion (and other things as well) by using them; they are part of the lived spiritual culture within which people find power, meaning and values to live by. They act on and are acted upon by the people who view and use them as part of their spiritual practice. As Morgan defines it, visual practice is the “visual mediation of relations among a particular group of humans and the forces that help organize their world. The medium of belief—using belief in the relational sense of a covenant and not merely assent to a proposition—is not only an image but also everything that a person or community does with and by means of an image” (p.55).

So, for example, at some point in the semester you will be learning the tea ceremony. The tea ceremony is a visual practice—manipulating tea utensils to prepare a delicious bowl of tea. How does the tea ceremony as a visual practice serve as a way of interacting and expressing what is meaningful, powerful and true for the people who participate in it?. How does the powerful relationship forged between the handling of the utensils, the drinking of the tea, the communion with others in a elegant but simple space of the tea room tie people into a deeper dimension of reality that transcends the everyday, the quotidian?

We will explore this by focusing on specific Japanese Buddhist visual practices that are have become, if you will, national icons of Japanese culture: Zen gardens, the tea ceremony, the art of *raku* making tea bowls for the ceremony, and Buddhist icons, and votive tablets (*ema*) to Jizō, a popular bodhisattva whose image has continued as the focus of worship for centuries in Japan.

Required Texts

1. David Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*
2. Kenneth Kraft, *Zen: Tradition and Transition*
3. Allen Weiss, *Zen Landscapes: Perspectives on Japanese Gardens and Ceramics*
4. Seno Tanaka and Sendo Tanaka, *The Tea Ceremony* (on back order)
5. Hank Glassman *The Face of Jizô*

Course Information

1. **Class Attendance.** Attendance is required. More than *two* absences will reduce your participation grade. Two cases of tardiness will be counted as one absence. An absence because of sickness, or a game, or practice is still an absence. If you enter the room after your name has been called in roll, you are tardy. (It is your responsibility to contact me immediately after class to change an absence into a tardy.) When you are absent or tardy, be sure to tell me why you missed class time. Don't "blow off" class, or give me the impression that you are doing so! Please Note: **Excessive absences (over 6 or three full weeks of class)** may require you to withdraw from the class (I will consider this on a case by case basis). Please note: In cases of emergency (family, medical, etc.) where you must leave campus for an extended period of time, please contact your advisor and the office of Student Life (x 5311), who will notify me in writing. You will also need to see me to discuss a plan for making up class work. Please also note: if you are having problems that are hindering your class attendance and performance in the class, contact me immediately.
2. **Class Work.** Read your syllabus carefully every week to find out what is happening. There really is no excuse for you not to know when papers and readings are due. If schedule changes are made during the semester, they will be announced in class, on Angel, and email. Class schedule, syllabus, assignments, and PowerPoint lectures can be found on Angel. Occasionally, scheduling conflicts do arise because of unavoidable commitments. In such cases, notify me well in advance of the test/paper due date so that other arrangements can be made. Otherwise, class work (such as tests, writing assignments) cannot be made up. **Late Work:** Do not expect that your printer or P drive will work ten minutes before class. Get your work done and ready for submission well in advance. I will automatically lower the grade of late papers (**-.5 per day that it is late**). If you do not have it during class time when it is due, then it is late and you should bring it to me as soon as possible. **Do not e-mail it or shove it under my office door.** Please kindly place it in my mailbox (the box that is directly above my name in the mailboxes in the Religious Studies Office, first floor Richardson Hall). **Exams:** Like going to a dentist, you need to take exams (in this case, to examine your mind, not your teeth). Occasionally, problems arise because of unavoidable commitments or illness. In such instances, notify me **well in advance** of the due date so that arrangements can be made. **Do not call me right before an exam** to tell me you are too sick to take it. Some of you may have **IEAP** needs. If so, notify me no later than the second week of class. **Extra-Credit:** There is no "extra-credit."
3. **Sakai** Information about this course will be sent to your St. Lawrence University e-mail account. You must therefore check e-mail regularly. For some readings and assignments, you will also need to access our course site through the online system Sakai. Sakai readings are marked by the following symbol in your class schedule: .
4. **Classroom Environment:** This class is *our* class. I will treat you with respect, listen carefully, answer your questions thoughtfully, and do my best to meet your educational needs. I will strive to create an open and welcome atmosphere for class discussion and to foster your personal intellectual growth as a student. I promise to work hard reading and reviewing your academic work with an eye to improving your thinking, writing, and communication skills. I will also strive to get to know you better as a student because I have learned that good teaching is teaching "to" rather than "at" students. If you have *any* problem with the class, your job is to tell me how I can do better. I hate getting complaints on evaluations after the class is over. On the other hand, as a student, you have obligations—you need to treat me and others with respect, listen and make thoughtful contributions to class discussion, attend class, and do the best job you can do completing assignments on time. You are also invited to get to know me better by visiting during office hours—my door is always open.

5. **Common Courtesy in Class:** Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off during class. Students who receive or make calls during class will be asked to leave. You may take notes on a laptop computer, although the instructor reserves the right to ask you to turn off the computer if circumstances warrant (Bring printed copies of your work and class readings to class). The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (e.g., giggling and whispering, texting, surfing the Internet, talking to yourself because you have a split personality, etc.) to leave class. If that occurs, the student will be marked absent for the day. Please also refrain from getting up in the middle of the class to go to the bathroom—it's only a 90 minute class!

Academic Dishonesty (From the SLU Student Handbook): All students at St. Lawrence University are bound by honor to maintain the highest level of academic integrity. By virtue of membership in the St. Lawrence community, every student accepts the responsibility to know the rules of academic honesty, to abide by them at all times, and to encourage all others to do the same.

Responsibility for avoiding behavior or situations from which academic dishonesty may be inferred rests entirely with the students. Claims of ignorance, unintentional error, and academic or personal pressure are not excuses for academic dishonesty. Students should be sure to learn from faculty what is expected as their own work and how the work of other people should be acknowledged. Instructors are expected to maintain conditions that promote academic honesty.

Instructors have the duty to investigate any instance involving possible academic dishonesty and must present evidence of academic dishonesty to the Academic Honor Council rather than make private arrangements with the student involved. Violations of the St. Lawrence University Code of Academic Honor are administered under the constitution of the Academic Honor Council [See Student Handbook for the Constitution]. **Please note:** I will turn in students who violate their honor code to the Honor Council.

Course Assessment:

1. **Class participation (10%) & Forum Postings (10%) (=20%):** Interesting class readings and content are worthy of sustained discussion. Yes, I will lecture sometimes, but I also want you to talk about what you're reading intelligently, raise questions and participate in class. I expect you to come to every class with your own questions and comments based on your reading, the films you have seen, etc. Some of these questions may be simple fact based questions—e.g. What are the items used in the tea ceremony? But others should be questions that are thought provoking—questions you want us all to ponder in class, questions that you want answered: Does the tea ceremony evoke what some might call a religious experience? You might also comment on readings—discussing a passage you found interesting or a concept you wanted to discuss more thoroughly in class. These questions or comments in response to the readings should be put upon the Sakai class forum site before the day's class. One of your responsibilities besides doing this is to read other student comments for the day's reading. **Forum posts are closed by 11 a.m. on the day the class meets.** Make sure you read others questions and comments and bring a copy of your own comment or question to bring to class. Class participation will be assessed provisionally at mid-term and graded at the end of the semester. As a "homework assignment," you are required to practice meditation for at least three sessions ((1) at the Zen Workshop with Hiruta Sensei (see schedule below) and (2) at either the Monday noon meditation sessions run by Dr. Erin McCarthy (Atwood Chapel) or (3) the regular North Country Zen Group, which meets Tuesdays in Atwood Hall's Chapel (first floor) from 6:30 to 8:30 pm and Sundays at 9:30 am. Please keep a record of the dates that you did so.. There will be a place of the mid-term participation assessment page for you to record your three sessions, which must be completed by mid-term (10/9). More than 3 will be rewarded with a higher participation grade. PLEASE Note—Failure to attend the Sunday *raku* firing on 11/2 will severely affect your participation grade. You're on notice that you have to attend this session and the Hiruta zazen workshop.

4.0= Excellent—Consistent makes Forum questions and comments, attentiveness, regular contributions to discussion, no absences, all meditation sessions.

3.0= Good—Often makes Forum questions and comments, attentiveness and sustained contribution to discussion, maximum one absences, all meditation sessions.

2.0= Fair --Forum Some questions and comments, attentiveness occasional contributions to discussion, maximum two absences, three meditation sessions.

1.0= Poor-- Few Forum questions and comments, bored, and does not contribute, maximum five absences, some meditation sessions.

0.0= Terrible-- No Forum questions and comments. Absent excessively, silent when here, does not do the reading, at or above six absences, no meditation sessions.

2. One Film Analyses (either on *Ugetsu* or *Rikyû*) (15%) (5 pages of text)

3. Three Projects with Reflection Essays (15% each or 45%) (4 pages of text each). This class is about visual practice. To that end, you are doing things visually throughout the semester. As you do them, I want you to think about them theoretically as well. Does your desktop Japanese garden help you understand some of the aesthetic principles of dry rock gardens (*karesansui*, 枯山水) as discussed by Weiss? Does making a *raku*-ware tea cup help you, for example understand Weiss's aesthetic notion of "cracks"? What about Rikyû's notion of "poverty tea" based on your own experience of the tea ceremony? Does the making and the placing of a votive tablet to Jizô help you understand how images work in popular Buddhist worship? Each project is supposed to help you understand class readings through actual practice of the rituals, and the making and using Buddhist material culture. A key part of this will not only making objects and performing with them, but also reflecting on your own experience, directly tying it into what you have read for this class. (Grade=50% project, 50% essay)

a. Making a Desktop Zen Garden. While we will be actually working in the SLU Japanese garden and studying some famous Japanese gardens in Japan, you are also assigned the task of making a desktop Zen garden of your own that, in your considered view, evokes some of the same religious-aesthetic principles as other famous gardens. (See the assignment sheet for more details). **Due October 16th.**

b. Making a *raku chawan* or Teabowl and Practicing the Tea Ceremony. You will be learning how to make a *raku*-ware tea bowl in this class. October 21st (Tuesday) we will have an in class workshop where we make the bowls. On Sunday, November 2nd, we will travel to Dragonfly Pottery outside Ogdensburg for a picnic and firing of our bowls. Plan on a late morning through afternoon session. This is mandatory so plan ahead to keep that date open. After making your bowls, you will learn how to use them in the tea ceremony. On Tuesday, November 11th, we will hold an exhibit of our bowls and a tea ceremony for guests (you have to get your friends to come) in the Skyes Common room. **Due November 11th and 13th.**

c. Making Your Own Personalized *ema* to "Manabi Jizô" or "The Jizô of Learning" to enshrine at the Northcountry Japanese garden. *Ema* or votive tablets are a key ritual object in popular Buddhism. They are purchased by temple parishioners to use when they have prayer requests to a buddha or bodhisattva who is enshrined in the temple. The faith is that these divinities have the power to give "this worldly benefits" to those who worship them (especially via their miracle working icons). On ?????, we will have a calligraphy workshop with to learn how to write Japanese characters. On Thursday, December 4th we will have an in class workshop where you draw and design your own *ema*, write your prayer request and enshrine it in the Northcountry Japanese garden, where a status of Jizô is now enshrined. One of you will make a scalar record of this to be published on the class cloud ebook. **Due December 11th.**

4. Final Research Project (20%, 7 page research paper on a topic of your choice). There are many possible topics to explore in Japanese Buddhist visual culture. We will devote some of class to talking about the possibilities. You will be responsible for writing a research paper on a topic of your choice to be submitted by the end of the semester. It must have four sources (excluding Internet sources even if they are relevant). Please also note I will flunk papers with

more than ten sentence-level errors (grammatical errors, spelling errors, punctuation errors, bibliographical style errors, etc.). See my research paper style sheet checklist for guidance. Use the Word Studio, proofread your paper, and get other people to proofread your paper to help you polish your paper. Their website has a wealth of information on proper citation style, and so on (See: <http://www.stlawu.edu/wordstudio/>). **Meet with me from 10/2 to 10/4 to discuss research paper ideas. Meet with me again on 11/4 to 11/6 with your thesis statement and bibliography of your sources (see bibliography sheet).** Paper will be due during the exam week.

DAILY SCHEDULE

Please Note:  Refers to online reading or film.

Please Note: Meditation Sessions are scheduled throughout the semester. You are required to attend two sessions minimum plus Hiruta Sensei's Zen Workshop.

August/September

Th 8/28 Introduction to the Course

T 9/2 What is "Visual Culture"?

Reading: Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, pp. 1-47.

H 4 Working in the SLU Japanese Garden

Reading: MacWilliams and Shrady, "The Northcountry Japanese Garden" & Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, pp.48-74.

T 9 Interpreting Visual Religious Practice---The Case of *Daruma-san*

Reading: Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, pp. 75-112

W 10 **Zen Workshop with Hiruta Sensei, Ichikukai dôjô, 7-8:30, Sykes**

Th 11 Introduction to Buddhism—Through Icons, Images, and Items

Art exhibit in Class: The Wheel of Life Thanka painting (from the Brush Art Gallery, SLU Permanent Collection)

T 16 Working in the SLU Japanese Garden

Movie Online: *Evoking Native Landscape Using Japanese Garden Principles*

Reading: Kraft, *Zen Tradition*, pp.1-11, 30-44

Th 18 The Mahayana Tradition-- Through Icons, Images, and Items—Kannon-sama

Reading: Kraft, *Zen Tradition*, pp.13-29

T 23 *Ugetsu* discussion/The Zen Tradition—Historical Overview

Reading: Philio Lopate, "*Ugetsu: From the Other Shore*" (at <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/401-ugetsu-from-the-other-shore>)

Kraft, *Zen Tradition*, pp.125-156.

Movie Online: *Ugetsu*

Th 25, Zen Principles and Practices



Reading: Kraft, *Zen Tradition*, pp.44-87.

T 30 Working in the SLU Japanese Garden

Paper #1 is due on *Ugetsu*

October

Meet with me from 10/2 to 10/4 to discuss research paper ideas.

Th 2 Muromachi Period Gozan System and the Arts

Reading: Akamatsu Toshihide and Philip Yampolsky, “Muromachi Zen and the Gozan System,” pp.313-30 (from Hall, ed. *Japan in the Muromachi Age* (1977).

Movie Online: *Principles and Practices of Zen* (first hour)

Th 9 (No Class)

Mid-Term Break

T 14 Famous Kyoto Zen Gardens—Ryōanji

Reading: Allan Weiss, *Zen Landscapes*, pp.1-55.

Movie Online: *Sakura Petals: Temples and Zen*

T 7 Zen Gardens— Daitokuji’s sub-gardens, Daisenin, Zuihoin, Ryōgenin, Kotoin etc

Reading: Allan Weiss, *Zen Landscapes*, pp. 85-125.

H 16 Gardens and Rakuware—A Common Aesthetics

Reading: Allan Weiss, *Zen Landscapes*, pp. 153-71, 199-226.

Project #1 is due Desktop Zen Garden with Short Reflection Essay

T 21 Workshop—Ann Donovan, *Chawan* or Tea Bowls---Making Raku (Pottery Studio, Noble Center)

Movie Online: **Throwing American Style Raku Pottery for Beginners**

Reading: Allan Weiss, *Zen Landscapes*, pp.173-196.

Th 23 The Tea Ceremony History

Reading: Tanaka and Tanaka, *The Tea Ceremony*, pp.10-76.

T 28 The Tea Ceremony Aesthetics

Reading: Tanaka and Tanaka, *The Tea Ceremony*, pp.78-119.

Movie Online: *The Japanese Tea Ceremony*

Th 30 Tea Ceremony & Practice (with Kaori Takashima MacWilliams)

Reading: Tanaka and Tanaka, *The Tea Ceremony*, pp.130-49.

November

Meet with me 11/4 to 11/6 with your thesis statement and bibliography.

Nov. 2 Sunday (Firing of Raku bowls) Ann Donovan’s Studio, Dragonfly Pottery. Please note this will be a half day event from 9 to 3 p.m. or so. Please bring lunch.

T 4 Tea Ceremony Practice (with Kaori Takashima MacWilliams)



Reading: Tanaka and Tanaka, *The Tea Ceremony*, pp.151-86

Th 6 Tea Ceremony as Ritual & Discussion of *Rikyû*
 Movie Online: *Rikyû*

T 11 Raku Exhibit and Tea Ceremony (Sykes Commons)

Project #2 is due

H 13 Jizô —Iconography of the Earthstore Bodhisattva
Reading: Glassman, *The Face of Jizô*, pp.1-43.

Project #2's Short Reflection Essay is due.

T 18—Kaz Takahashi Enso Workshop

H 20 No Class

Paper #2 is due on *Rikyu*

December

T 2 Jizô —Ritual Practice, Temples, and *Ema*
Reading: Glassman, *The Face of Jizô*, pp.44-92.

H 4 *Ema* Workshop/Scalar Project /Evaluations

T 9 Jizô —*Koyasu Jizô*, *Mizuko Jizô*, and *Cute Jizô*s
Reading: Glassman, *The Face of Jizô*, pp.135-93.

H11 *Ema* Display and Placement in the Garden
Project #3 Due with Short Reflection Essay

Final Research Paper Project due during the exam period. Thursday, December 18th.

