

REL 533:
Readings in Japanese Religions:
Ancient and Medieval Buddhist Texts

W 9:10–12:00 PM, Jones 305

Instructor: Bryan Lowe

Drop-in Hours: Monday, 9:30 AM–12:30 PM (and by appointment); 233, 1879 Hall

Course Description

This course introduces Buddhist texts and genres from ancient and medieval Japan (roughly eighth through twelfth centuries). We read tales, liturgical texts and doctrinal works as well as other sources in accord with student interests with the goal of gaining familiarity with writing styles and vocabulary in diverse genres. We will use these texts to discuss broader issues including cosmology, ritual, and periodization. In addition to translation and discussion, students will complete weekly assignments on the use of reference materials for the study of Buddhism and Japanese religions. Students will complete a final research project in consultation with me. This most typically takes the form of a translation or research paper using a primary source, but there is some flexibility in the precise format. Innovative projects such as those incorporating digital humanities are welcome. Students approaching general exams may also write on a topic to help them prepare. Students will also present their findings to one another in a mock conference presentation on the final day of class.

This semester, we will tentatively read portions of the following works: *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記, the 5/11 *gammon* 五月十一日經願文, *Tōdaiji fujumon kō* 東大寺諷誦文稿, *Ben kenmitsu nikyō ron* 弁頭密二教論, *Shinnyo kan* 真如觀, and *Kannon kōshiki* 講式. The instructor will use editions to match students' needs; as such, it is open to any student with a background in either classical Japanese (*bungo* or *kanbun*) or classical Chinese. Modern Japanese is not required. Sinologists are welcome and encouraged to participate.

Learning objectives

This course aims to train students in conducting research and developing projects. By the end of the course, successful students will have improved their skills in translation. They will be able to utilize reference works to find manuscripts, locate published editions, and look up terms. We will also gain familiarity with key developments in Japanese Buddhism including the transition from “ancient” to “medieval,” the *setsuwa* genre, the category of esoteric, original enlightenment thought, and shifting ritual modes. Finally, we will work toward developing publishable translations and articles and presenting our research in oral form.

Course Requirements/Grading

In accord with the Department of Religion's grading practices, successful students will receive a “*”. Passing requires the following:

- Regular attendance (any absence should be excused)
- Weekly translation of primary texts
- Short weekly research skills assignments on using reference works
- Reading at least one relevant scholarly article in English per week

- Oral presentation of final project
- Fifteen-page research paper or translation

Learning and Wellness

Each and every one of us brings different skills to the classroom. Do not be intimidated by your classmates and do not be too hard on yourself. We are all (and I include myself here) still learning. We should work together and help one another. You are not an impostor and you belong here.

You learn best when you are rested. Take care of yourself. Sleep and eat. If you are having any trouble at all, [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) located in the McCosh Health Center is a valuable and confidential resource. Please tell me if the coursework is too much; I'm still learning about proper pacing as well.

Accommodations

I am committed to creating an effective and welcoming environment for all. If you have a learning or physical disability or require any accommodations, the University requires that those requests be made through the [Office of Disability Services](#).

Schedule (the pace and precise assignments will be determined by student abilities and needs; I have included readings listed as “if time”—these are not required but should only be done if you complete the assignment quickly and crave more work. Conversely, if you feel the assigned load is too much, please let me know that as well and only do what you can)

Part 1: Tales and Ritual Prayers: The Spread of Buddhism in Ancient Period

Week 1 (9/11)

Introductions; personal background worksheet (to be distributed before class); cold reading assignment

Weeks 2–3 (9/18, 9/25)

Primary source: *Nihon ryōiki*, excerpts (1:7, 1:22, 2:3, 2:15, 2:29, 2:30, 3:19; if time, add 3:38–39)

Secondary sources:

9/18: William LaFleur, “In and Out the Rokudō”

9/25: Rachel Dumas, “Historicizing Japan’s Abject Femininity”

Research skills assignments:

9/18: Bibliographic worksheet (distributed in class) on identifying extant editions and other bibliographic information

9/25: Worksheet comparing modern editions

Weeks 4–5 (10/2, 10/9)

Primary source: Kōmyō’s 5/11 *ganmon* and *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*, excerpts (lines 101–122; if time, add 80–101)

Secondary sources:

10/2: Yoshida Kazuhiko, “Religion in the Classical Period”
10/9: John Whitman, “Contested Vernacular Readings”

Research skills assignments:

10/2: Bibliographic worksheet for *Tōdaiji fujumon kō*

10/9: Japanese secondary scholarship worksheet—use databases to compose bibliography of five recent Japanese secondary works on the *Tōdaiji fujumon kō* or *ganmon*

Part 2: Essays and Ceremonial Lectures: Defining Medieval Japanese Buddhism

Weeks 6–7 (10/16, 10/23)

Primary source: *Ben kenmitsu nikyō*, excerpts (if time, read complete text)

Secondary sources:

10/16: Ryūichi Abé, *Weaving of Mantra*, 187–235

10/23: Lucia Dolce, “Reconsidering the Taxonomy of the Esoteric”

Reference assignments:

10/16: Bibliographic worksheet

10/23: Sectarian dictionaries—Look up three terms in a sectarian dictionary

Weeks 8–9 (11/6, 11/13)

Primary sources: *Shinnyo kan*, excerpts (if time, read Harvard edition)

Secondary sources:

11/6: James Dobbins, “Envisioning Kamakura Buddhism”

11/13: Jacqueline Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 190–236

Reference assignments:

11/6: Bibliographic worksheet

11/13: Buddhological dictionaries—bring in entries of a single term from three dictionaries

Weeks 10–11 (11/20, 12/4)

Primary sources: *Kannon kōshiki* (if time, read one other *kōshiki* of your choosing)

Secondary sources:

11/20: Barbara Ambros, James Ford, and Michaela Mross, “Editors’ Introduction: *Kōshiki* in Japanese Buddhism”

12/4: Barbara Ambros, “A Rite of Their Own: Japanese Buddhist Nuns and the Anan *kōshiki*”

Reference assignments:

11/20: Bibliographic worksheet

12/4: Anglophone secondary scholarship worksheet—use databases to compose a bibliography of five recent Anglophone secondary works on *kōshiki* (they cannot all be from the recent *JJRS* issue).

Week 12 (12/11)

Student presentations (details to follow)

Paper due on Dean's Date (January 14)