

Buddhism, Contemporaneity, Japanese Art and Literature

For the *Shin-nihongaku* lecture series, Tokyo University, January 15-17, 2018
Instructor: Ryūichi Abé

Outline

This course aims at introducing the core theories in Japanese Buddhist traditions as that engage actively with various issues in contemporary social life. By doing so, the course presents a fresh new interpretation – through the lens of Buddhist theories -- of a wide range of works of Japanese visual art and literature. They include contemporary fictions, medieval Japanese illustrated sutra scrolls and Nō dramas, Japanese modern and pop art paintings, and scientific fiction animation. The course as a whole intends to make two points: first, it demonstrates that literary and artistic traditions in Japan in pre-modern ages developed into their finest forms by intertwining themselves deeply with Buddhism; second, it suggests that as interpretive theories, Buddhist thought continues to exercise power in better understanding and appreciating Japanese literary, visual and performative arts, both classical and modern.

Syllabus

• Lecture 1 (January 15th 10:25~12:00)

What is Selflessness, Emptiness, and Mahayana? And why do they matter to us?

- A study of the Twelve Chains of Causation, the Twofold Truth, and the Bodhisattva Paths.
- Implication of these theories for the contemporary culture of information flooding, political tensions, and new forms of art and literature in society.

Assignments: Mitchell and Jacoby, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2013, 3rd edition) Chapters 2, 4, selections from Chapter 5 (pp.149-163); Selections from Nagarjuna, *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Jay Garfield, ed. And trans., Oxford University Press) pp. 28-30; 189-195.

• Lecture 2 (January 15th 13:00~14:45)

Buddhist Psychology as Literary Criticism.

- What does it mean by “Mind-Only”?
- The Eightfold Consciousness
- All things in the world as language and culture constructs
- Mādyamika, Yogācāra and their relevance to contemporary literary theories
- Reading of Yoshimoto Banana’s short story as a case study

Assignments: Mitchell & Jacoby, *Buddhism*, selections from Chapter 5 (pp.163-173); Banana Yoshimoto, *Asleep* (Michael Emmerich, trans., Grove Press), pp. 105-177.

• **Lecture 3 (January 16th 10:25~12:00)**

Reading the *Lotus Sutra* as a Literary Text

- What are Mahayana Sutras and what is unique about the *Lotus*?
- The *Lotus Sutra* as a trans-sectarian, ecumenical text
- The basic plot, narrative structure, and rhetorical devices of the sutra
- The relationship between philosophical ideas and poetic expressions

Assignments: *The Lotus Sutra* (Burton Watson, trans., Columbia University Press), Chapters 1-12, 15-17; Carl Bielefeldt, "Expedient Devices, the One Vehicle, and the Life Span of the Buddha" in *Reading of the Lotus Sutra* (Teiser and Stone eds., Columbia University Press), pp. 62-82; Abé, "Word" in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (Donald Lopez ed., University of Chicago Press), pp. 291-310.

• **Lecture 4 (January 16th 13:00~14:45)**

Problematizing the Dragon Princess Episode

- Shortfalls in the conventional interpretation of the Dragon Princess
- Character analysis of the Dragon Princess and her place in the *Lotus Sutra's* grand narrative
- The Dragon Princess, Buddhism and issues surrounding her gender and race
- Two case studies: the Noh Drama *Ama* and the *Heike Nōkyō* frontispiece (scroll 12)

Assignments: Royall Tyler ed. and trans., *Japanese Nō Dramas* (Penguin Classics), pp.1-36; Abé, "Revisiting the Dragon Princess," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 42/1.

• **Lecture 5 (January 17th 10:25~12:00)**

Mandala, Jung, and Mandelbrot: an approach to Japanese Painting

- Carl Jung on mandala
- Mandala as Indra's jewel net
- Mandelbrot, fractal and mandala
- Mandala, super-flat and multi-perspectivism
- Mandala and Japanese painting, modern and traditional

Assignments: Mitchell & Jacoby, *Buddhism*, selections from Chapters 7 and 9, pp. 237-243, 314-318; B.B. Mandelbrot, "Fractal Geometry: What is it, and what does it do?" (*Proceeding of the Royal Society of London*, Series A, May 8, 1989). pp. 3-16; Murakami Takashi, *Superflat*. Christine Guth, "Japan 1868- 1945: Art Architecture, and National Identity." *Art Journal* 55/3, pp. 16-20; Hugo Munsterberg, "Tradition and Innovation in Modern Japanese Painting." *Art Journal* 27/2, pp. 151-155 (JSOR). John Clark, "Modernity in Japanese Painting." *Art History* 9/2, pp. 213-231

• **Lecture 6 (January 1+th 13:00~14:45)**

Buddhism, Technology and Art

- Mori Masahiro's theory of Uncanny Valley
- Buddhism, robotics and negative feedback
- Buddhism and man-machine complex
- Concluding review: a critical appraisal of *Ghost In the Shell* by Mamoru Oshii

Assignments: Masahiro Mori, *The Buddha and the Robots* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing) Chapters 1-4, 8, 10, 11; W.A. Borody, "The Japanese Robotist Masahiro Mori's Buddhist Inspired Concept of Uncanny Valley" (*Journal of Evolution and Technology* 23/1, December 2013), pp. 31-44 ; Shin, Hyewon, "Voice and Vision in Oshii Mamoru's Ghost in the Shell: Beyond Cartesian Optics." (*Animation-An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6/1) pp.7-23; Frenchy Lunning, "Giant Robots and Superheroes: Manifestation of Divine Power, East and West" (*Mechademia* Vol. 3, Limits of the Human), pp. 274-282; Oshii Mamoru, *Ghost in the Shell 1* (DVD Video).