**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.
  

- **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

• 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


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

Problematising 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)


• 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

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