Prof. Mikael Bauer: mikael.bauer@mcgill.ca, Birks 004

**Online office hours:** Monday 11-12 or by appointment (mikael.bauer@mcgill.ca)

**Assessment:** Three take home tests each worth 20%; 2000 word essay (40%) to be submitted by DECEMBER 10 (10pm). The format of the three short take home tests will be introduced in class.

The 2000 word essay should be submitted electronically (WORD file !) through the course website only. The font should be Times New Roman (size 12), pages should be numbered and no title page is required. Style format should be Chicago.

**Readings:** No purchases necessary. All books are available through e-book/online where indicated.
**Theme 1: Deconstructing ‘religion’ in Japan**

We start our course with a general introduction and discussion on the concept ‘religion.’ What is understood by this concept and what term(s) would the Japanese themselves use to describe their traditions? Starting from letters and diaries from early Christian missionaries, we first address the way the West has reflected upon Japanese religions, before moving on to Japanese attitudes to the practice and study of ‘religion.’

**Lecture 1 Class overview**


**Lecture 2 The Problem of ‘religion’ and the Western perception of Japanese traditions**


**Theme 2 Female Shamans and Foreign Divinities**

Chinese chronicles described the early Japanese state in connection with the semi-historical Himiko, a female shaman who apparently ruled over ‘Yamatai’ in the 2nd-3rd century. But, how did this early state look like and what formed its religious backbone? Through the earliest chronicles and discussions of archaeological interpretations, students will explore these earliest traces of Japanese religiosity and state formation.

**Lecture 1**


Theme 3 Shintō: a historical and phenomenological approach to Kami worship

Kami (spirits, gods), sacred trees and rocks have been a part of Japan’s religiosity since pre-historic times. For the modern visitor, the bright, red ‘torii’ gates represent some of the most iconic images of Japan. However, how does the modern ‘Way of the Gods’ (Shintō) compare to its pre-modern counterpart and to what extent can Shintō be described as an ‘invented tradition’? We will trace the earliest sites of kami-worship, analyse its relation to yin-yang divination (onmyōdō) and touch upon its entanglement with the Buddhist tradition.

Theme 4 The introduction of Buddhism, Chinese learning and the creation of the early Japanese state

From its earliest beginnings in India, Buddhism has been connected with the organization of the state and the formulation of sovereignty. In week 4 we discuss the connection between doctrinal and institutional developments throughout the Nara (710-794) and Heian (794-1185) periods. In this session, students will have to adopt an interdisciplinary approach and combine insights from the fields of History and Buddhist Studies to critically analyse the concept of ‘State Buddhism.’ Readings include perspectives from doctrine, institutionalism and gender.
FIRST TEST AT HOME (20%)

Lecture 2

Theme 5 Poetics of the Dharma

In this week we explore the structure and content of certain key Mahāyāna sūtra’s used in Japan. Students will familiarize themselves with the ‘Bodhisattva Path’ as portrayed in doctrine and art and proceed to analyzing the influence of this central philosophy on the development of pre-modern Japanese literary and performing arts. By doing so, we will question the application of certain categories to the study of Japanese religiosity.

Lecture 1
Watson, Burton, trans. The Vimalakīrti Sūtra, entire. Available online.

Lecture 2
LaFleur, William R. “Floating Phrases and Fictive Utterances: The Rise and Fall of Symbols.” In The Karma of Words. pp.1-25 (scans available on website under ‘readings’)

Theme 6 Buddhism and the art of performance

In this short section we will touch upon two major topics: the occurrence of Buddhist themes and elements of kami worship in the performing arts on the one hand and the interpretation of certain genres of ‘theatre’ as religious performance or ritual.

Lecture 1 Buddhism and Nō theatre
Tyler, Royall. ‘“The Path of My Mountain”: Buddhism in Nō.’ In Flowing Traces, Buddhism and the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan, pp. 149-179 (e-book).

**Theme 7 Aesthetics of impermanence**

While the famous Tale of Genji was written by a court lady, we will investigate the work of two Buddhist monks who engaged the writing of poetry. Here, we will transcend the division between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ writings and question the validity of applying these categories to pre-modern Japan. Students will read translations of primary sources and trace the presence of particular narratives that combine Buddhist elements, instances of kami worship and traces of yin-yang divination. In combination with week 6, students will thus have acquired a general overview of premodern Japanese eclecticism.

**Lecture 1 Saigyō and Chōmei**


**Lecture 2**


**Theme 8 Faith and Practice in Medieval Japan: The Pure Land**

The image of the Pure Land has been present in Japanese Buddhism as early as the Nara and Heian periods, but following political and religious changes around the 12th century several new Buddhist schools gradually move to the forefront. In this week we will discuss their characteristics and focus on particular Buddhist thinkers whose thought would form the basis of schools that would flourish during the later Muromachi period (1336-1573). We will mainly focus on the concepts of ‘Faith’ and ‘Practice’ and analyse their significance in selected primary sources.
Lecture 1

Dobbins, James. “Jōdo Shinshū,” 1-10 (scans online under ‘readings’ folder).
Dobbins, James. “Pure Land Buddhism and Women,” 93-106 (scans online under ‘readings’ folder).

Lecture 2

Hirota, Dennis. No Abode, xxi-li; Hymn of Amida’s Vow, 3-6 (e-book).
Callahan, Christopher. “Recognizing the Founder, Seeing Amida Buddha.”

Theme 9 The Art of Sitting

The Zen tradition had an enormous impact on Japan’s religious and artistic history. This week, we will explore selections from the Platform Sutra, and read texts composed by Eisai (1141-1215), Dōgen (1200-1253) and the famous poet Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694). To conclude, we will address the recreation of Zen in the modern period by looking at The Book of Tea by Kakuzo Okakura (1862-1913).

Lecture 1

Yampolsky, Philip B. 1967. The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, selections (scans online under ‘readings’ folder).

Lecture 2

Cook, Francis, trans. “The Sounds of the Valley Streams, the Forms of the Mountains.” In How to Raise an Ox, Zen Practice as Taught in Master Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō. pp. 69-80; pp. 17-27 (scans online under ‘readings’ folder).

Theme 10 The Edo period

Lecture 1:
SECOND TEST AT HOME (20%)

Lecture 2 Christianity: Encounter with the West


Theme 11 The Encounter with Modernity: from Edo to Meiji

Lecture 1 The rise of new Buddhist thought


Lecture 2 Religion and political thought


Theme 12 Religion in contemporary Japan

Lecture 1 In search for a new identity: religion in post-war Japan


**Lecture 2** Absence or presence? Discourse on modern Japanese religiosity

**THIRD TEST AT HOME 20%**

**DECEMBER 10 (10pm) : 2000 WORD ESSAY DUE**