

Sacred heritage in Japan (and beyond)

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Course description

Today's preeminent cultural buzzword, "heritage" appears on countless signposts, book covers, and tourism websites. Popular and scholarly interest in—and seeming devotion to—all things heritage increased so dramatically in recent decades that some scholars resort to religious analogies to make sense of it. Historian David Lowenthal, who helped spark the heritage studies movement, described heritage in terms of "cult," "creed," and "faith" (1996: 1–2); anthropologist Christoph Brumann critiqued heritage "belief" and "theology" and called for scholarly "agnosticism" in its study (2014: 173–174). But what does heritage mean? How does heritage work? Where did heritage come from? In this seminar, we will investigate the historical roots and contemporary branches of "sacred heritage," or heritage of religious interest, in Japanese and global contexts. Integrating perspectives from the disciplines of religion, history, cultural anthropology, archaeology, and others, we will examine a range of themes: (1) theories and concepts of heritage (vis-à-vis tradition, modernity, history, the sacred, the secular); (2) national identity, cultural politics, and the construction of "cultural heritage" (and "culture") in modern and modernizing Japan; (3) the identification, assessment, interpretation, representation, preservation, promotion, exhibition, and contestation of cultural heritage; and (4) tourism and the commodification of sacred heritage. A field trip to Munakata Grand Shrine, which was designated as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 2017, will contextualize and enrich the readings and class discussions, as will individual case studies of heritage objects and sites.

Course goals

By the end of the course, successful students will:

- Understand, identify, and evaluate various meanings and uses of heritage, with focus on: the relationship between religion, tradition, and heritage; the refashioning of religious sites and objects as (secular) heritage objects; and the distinction between heritage and history
- Examine diverse theoretical and methodological approaches to studying heritage
- Identify and evaluate controversies, debates, ethical dilemmas, and political issues through case studies of sacred heritage in Japan
- Discuss and debate the roles and responsibilities of creating and managing heritage
- Practice gathering and evaluating data, and analyzing diverse and sometimes contradictory data

Assessment

Participation (25%)

Students are expected to attend every class, arrive on time to class, and remain attentive throughout the entire period. Participation will be assessed on attendance, contributions to discussion, and active engagement in in-class activities.

Class journal (25%)

To facilitate active participation and demonstrate engagement with course material, you will be required to keep a class journal that logs the most important points of the readings, critical questions, and thoughtful comments.

Presentation of secondary scholarship (25%)

Students will present on supplemental readings in each class, providing an opportunity for us to cover more ground in a short period of time. Presentations (5–10 minutes) should provide a summary of the main topic and argument, explain the types of examples used, highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the reading, and pose discussion questions for the group. Eligible readings are marked with * in the syllabus.

Mini case study (25%)

Each student will research and present a mini case study on a heritage object or site of their own choosing (ideally something relevant to your thesis interests). The assignment entails two parts: (1) a 15-minute in-class presentation on the last day of class, February 18; and (2) a short case report of roughly 1500 words or 3–4 pages, double spaced, due March 1. The presentation and report should cover all major course themes in some capacity. Note that a portion of each class will be devoted to helping you prepare the case study.

Course readings

Readings will be distributed to students via Dropbox. I have designed the readings to provide you with a breadth of perspectives (in English) on heritage in Japanese and global contexts. Students must complete all required readings in advance of class. Supplemental readings, while not required, are highly recommended and will be integrated into class discussion. The assigned reading load may appear heavy, but you are not expected to read each page closely or gain mastery over each reading. I suggest the following manner of preparation (which will also aid you in creating the class journal):

- 1) Skim the entire selection of readings. Please note that skimming does not mean reading in a hurry, reading sloppily, or reading only the last line and the first line; rather, skimming, as a disciplined activity, means finding the most information in the least amount of time. Look for arguments, definitions, key concepts, and important signposts (i.e., “The aim of this book,” “I will argue,” etc.) and pay attention to them.
- 2) Try making your own outline of the readings.
- 3) Mark parts you do not understand, areas of uncertainty, and so on, and bring them to class.
- 4) For readings with an argument, mark two or three areas of potential disagreement or debate and construct a critique of the reading to share during discussion. The following inquiries can help guide you:
 - What is the main argument?
 - What data/evidence or reasoning does the author use to illustrate and/or to support her/his argument?
 - Are the arguments well supported? How or why not?
 - What interested you about this reading?
 - Are there questions that arise from reading this? Your questions could address issues of terminology, methodology, clarity, content; or they could point to contradictions or omissions in the author’s argument.

Course schedule

Monday, February 11 (13:00–16:00)
Topic: Orientations and foundations
Key discussion points: ○ Introduction to the course ○ Terms, definitions, tropes ▪ heritage/history/tradition/culture ▪ past/present, premodern/modern, sacred/secular ▪ identity, memory ▪ the nation/nationalism ▪ contestation and dissonance
Required readings: • Lowenthal, <i>The Past is a Foreign Country</i>, pp. 1–2, 333–343, 353–358, 594–598 <i>only</i> • Hobsbawm, <i>The Invention of Tradition</i>, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions” • Morris-Suzuki, <i>Re-Inventing Japan</i>, Introduction (pp. 1–8 <i>only</i>), Ch. 2 “Japan” (<i>GROUP 1 only</i>) and Ch. 4 “Culture” (<i>GROUP 2 only</i>) • Vlastos, <i>Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan</i>, “Tradition: Past/Present Culture and Modern Japanese History” <i>esp. pp. 1–5</i> • Rots and Teeuwen, “Formations of the Secular in Japan” <i>pp. 3–11 only</i> Supplemental readings: • Ashworth, Graham, and Tunbridge, <i>Pluralising Pasts</i>, Intro and Ch. 3 “Theories and Concepts of Heritage” • Lowenthal, <i>The Heritage Crusade</i>, Ch. 1 “Heritage Ascendant” and Ch. 6 “The Purpose of Heritage” • Hartog, <i>Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time</i>, Ch. 5 “Heritage and the Present” • Smith, “Heritage, Identity and Power”* • Brumann, “Heritage Agnosticism”* • Graburn, “What is Tradition?”* • Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”* • Strother, “From ‘Tradition’ to ‘Heritage’ in Global Africa”*
Tuesday, February 12 (13:00–16:00)
Topic: Constructing cultural heritage in Japan
Key discussion points: • Defining and designating cultural heritage (Meiji to modern) • Heritage ownership • The politics of representation

Required readings:

- Pai, *Heritage Management in Korea and Japan*, Preface (only through p. xxxi), Ch. 2 “Collecting Japan’s Curios: World Fairs, Imperial Tombs, and Preservation Laws” (GROUP 2 only), and Ch. 3 “Tracing Japan’s Lineage: Art, Architecture, and Conquest Dynasties” (GROUP 1 only)
- Galli, “In the Service of National Culture: Japanese Preservation and Its Political Context, 1871–1994”
- Hall, “Whose heritage?: un-settling ‘The Heritage’, re-imagining the Post-nation” skim for main ideas

Supplemental readings:

- Kakiuchi, “Cultural heritage protection system in Japan: current issues and prospects for the future”
- McDermott, “The Hōryūji Treasures and Early Meiji Cultural Policy”*
- Guth, “Kokuhō: From Dynastic to Artistic Treasure”*
- Yamaguchi, “The Poetics of Exhibition in Japanese Culture”*
- Foxwell, “Japan as Museum? Encapsulating Change and Loss in Late-Nineteenth-Century Japan”*

Wednesday, February 13 (13:00–16:00)

Topic: Global and local perspectives on heritage (modern and contemporary)

Key discussion points:

- The World Heritage concept: development, assessment, uses, meanings, critiques
- Japan Heritage and Japan-funded heritage projects
- Tangible and intangible heritage
- “Soft power,” cultural diplomacy

Required readings:

- Choose 1 or 2:
 - Brumann and Cox, *Making Japanese Heritage*, Introduction
 - Brumann and Berliner, *World Heritage on the Ground: Ethnographic Perspectives*, “Introduction: UNESCO World Heritage – Grounded?”
 - Brumann, “Multilateral Ethnography: Entering the World Heritage Arena”
 - Brumann, “Shifting tides of world-making in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention”
- Akagawa, “Rethinking the global heritage discourse –overcoming ‘East’ and ‘West’?”
- Kawada and Hayashi, “Cooperation between UNESCO and Japan in the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage” skim
- Labadi, “From Exclusive to Inclusive” skim

Supplemental readings:

- Russell, “Cultural Property and Heritage in Japan” esp. pp. 7–11 and 37–61
- Akagawa, “Japan and the Rise of Heritage in Cultural Diplomacy”*
- Stovel, “Origins and Influence of the Nara Document on Authenticity” and *Nara Document on Authenticity**

- Cang, "Defining Intangible Cultural Heritage and its Stakeholders: the Case of Japan"*
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production"*
- Foster, "The UNESCO Effect: Confidence, Defamiliarization, and a New Element in the Discourse on a Japanese Island"*

Thursday, February 14 (13:00–16:00)

Presentation by Dr. DeWitt on World Cultural Heritage sites Ōminesan and Okinoshima

Topic: Tourism and the commodification of heritage

Key discussion points:

- Tourism
- Consumerism
- Preservation
- Sustainability

Required readings:

- Di Giovine, "UNESCO's Heritage-scape: A Global Endeavour to Produce 'Peace in the Minds of Men' through Tourism and Preservation"
- Oedewald, *Japan and Asian Modernities*, "Tradition and its Uses" *skim*

Supplemental readings:

- Pederson/UNESCO, *Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites: A Practical Manual for World Heritage Site Managers*
- Reader, *Pilgrimage in the Marketplace*, "Pilgrimages in Department Stores and Airport Malls"*
- Francis-Lindsay, "The Intrinsic Value of Cultural Heritage and its Relationship to Sustainable Tourism Development: The Contrasting Experiences of Jamaica and Japan"*
- Yasuda, "World Heritage and cultural tourism in Japan"*
- McGuire, "What's at Stake in Designating Japan's Sacred Mountains as UNESCO World Heritage Sites? Shugendo Practices in the Kii Peninsula"*

Friday, February 15 (8:30–18:00)

Excursion to Munakata Grand Shrine (UNESCO World Heritage site)

Monday, February 18 (14:30–17:30)

- Student presentations, course review, and final discussion

Required readings:

- Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, Ch. 7 "The Practice of Heritage"

Bibliography

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- Cang, Voltaire Garces. 2007. "Defining Intangible Cultural Heritage and its Stakeholders: the Case of Japan." *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 2: 46–55
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Relevant links

Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō)

- [Policy of Cultural Affairs in Japan \(Fiscal 2017\)](#)
- [Pamphlets on Cultural Properties](#)
- [Introduction to Cultural Properties](#)

- Japan Heritage

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (Gaimushō)

- Outline of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Cooperation with International Organizations (UNESCO, UNU): Cultural Heritage

UNESCO

- UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972)
- World Heritage Global Strategy
- World Heritage Criteria
- UNESCO Intangible Heritage Convention (2003)
- Heritage of Religious Interest: UNESCO Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest
- Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention
- UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust for the Preservation and Promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (Tobunken)

Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (Nabunken)