This is a tentative course outline for ARTH 467: Arts of Zen Buddhism. The final syllabus will be available in early 2018. If you have any questions, please contact Prof. Wang directly.

Arts of Zen Buddhism

ARTH 467, Spring 2018
M 2:00-4:30pm, Walsh 397

Professor Michelle C. Wang
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Course Description:
Zen Buddhism is one of the major traditions of Buddhism in East Asia and was moreover an instrumental force in shaping modern perceptions of Japan in the west. Over the course of the semester, we will analyze how the perceived distinctiveness of Zen Buddhism – as marked by concepts such as mind-to-mind transmission, master-disciple lineage, and sudden enlightenment – was constructed through the visual arts and how the arts in turn contributed to monk-patron relations and the cultural lives of monks outside the monastic walls. Among the weekly topics to be covered are: ink landscape paintings, portraits of Zen masters, the tea ceremony and ceramic tea wares, as well as Beat Zen and the impact of Buddhism upon postwar artists in the United States. No prior knowledge of Asian art is required or assumed.

In the Spring 2018 iteration of this course, the main assignment will be a Wikipedia project in which each class member will be responsible for the authorship of a substantial Wikipedia entry on a certain aspect of Zen art. This project will foster the development of research, critical thinking, and writing skills. The goals for this project are two-fold: (1) you will learn to explain abstruse concepts and topics in an accessible and intelligent manner to diverse audiences beyond the Georgetown community, thereby making an impact on the popular contemporary understanding of Zen Buddhism and Zen art; (2) in the process, you will address in a constructive manner the ways in which Zen Buddhism and Zen art have been represented in popular culture from the mid-20th century onward, and understand the historical and social mechanisms by which discourses on Zen art have shaped perceptions regarding the perceived distinctiveness of Zen Buddhism and Japanese culture. Students wishing to write a research paper instead of the Wikipedia entry may do so; please discuss with Prof. Wang.

This course is a Doyle Seminar, part of the Doyle Engaging Difference Program, a new campus-wide curricular initiative, and gives faculty the opportunity to enhance the student research component of upper-level seminars that address questions of national, social, cultural, religious, moral, and other forms of difference. The Doyle seminars are intended to deepen student learning about diversity and different through enhanced research opportunities, interaction with thought leaders, and dialogue with the Georgetown community and beyond.
Learning Goals:
In this class, you will
(1) foster a learning community through your active oral participation in class and written participation on the class blog.
(2) conduct research using a range of specialized art history and Buddhist studies literature and direct examination of works of art.
(3) develop a substantial research topic that results in original insights into works of Buddhist art and architecture, and an awareness of the historiographical issues surrounding the study of Chan/Zen art and architecture.

Textbooks and Resources:

Another textbook is available as a large pdf download (152 MB) from JSTOR: Helmut Brinker and Hiroshi Kanazawa, Zen: Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings (Zürich: Artibus Asiae, 1996). To access JSTOR, go to the A-Z Databases page of the library website: http://guides.library.georgetown.edu/az.php. A copy of this book will also be placed on reserve. Finally, additional readings as marked will be available on the Blackboard site for this class.

Some books that are relevant to the class will be placed on reserve in Lauinger Library in order to help you develop your research topic. In addition to those books, a very useful source for background information on art in Asia is the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/. A useful reference for history background is Asia for Educators: http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/.

Class Trips:
We will visit the storage room of the Freer and Sackler Galleries several times (3~4) this semester in order to examine Chinese and Japanese paintings and Japanese tea ceramics, and to learn from the expertise of the curatorial staff. For the Wikipedia project, we will also make use of the research materials in the Freer and Sackler Library and work under the guidance of the research librarians. In order to understand how ceramics and other utensils were used in the tea ceremony, we will visit a local tea school, Chado Urasenke Tankokai.

Sample List of Class Topics and Readings (actual reading assignments may vary):

Zen in the West


The Platform Sūtra and the Sixth Patriarch

Schüttler and Teiser, eds., Readings of the Platform Sūtra, 1-16, 18-36, 39, 53-76, 77, 80-83, 88-108

Zen Patriarchs: From Shussan Shaka to Bodhidharma

Brinker and Kanazawa, Zen: Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings, 121-135, 149-154
(Blackboard) Peter D. Hershock, Chan Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), 81-93

Zen Portraits: Monastic Lineage, Memory, and Ritual

Schüttler and Teiser, eds., Readings of the Platform Sūtra, 109-13
(Blackboard) Yukio Lippit, “Negative Verisimilitude: The Zen Portrait in Medieval Japan,” in Vishakha N. Desai, ed., Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century (Williamstown, MA: Clark Art Institute, 2007), 64-95
Showing the Path to Enlightenment: Eccentric Figures

Brinker and Kanazawa, *Zen: Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*, 138-149 (skim 220-227)  

Zen Literary Arts and Landscape Painting

Brinker and Kanazawa, *Zen: Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*, 192-197  
Parker, *Zen Buddhist Landscape Arts of Early Muromachi Japan (1336-1573)*, 51-107  

Tea and Politics in Premodern Japan