



USA

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My Research Interests

My research is set in the field of East Asian art, in which I have very broad and diverse interests. It focuses on the early Buddhist visual culture of Japan (art, icons, temples), especially Buddhist sculpture of the seventh to tenth century. This interest flowered into a book on temples and icons associated with the ancient Buddhist masters Kūkai and Saichō, and the Chinese Buddhist ritual goods they imported after their study in Tang China during the early ninth century. The roots of Buddhism and other religious traditions in Japan and the perception of Buddhist icons by ancient society are of great interest to me. I moved from a professorship at an American university to Kyushu University in large part to be closer to the sources of my research. These include the rich temple and shrine history of Kyushu, its trade with East Asia, and the fine scholars here at Kyūdai.

Many months of research were spent in Kyoto and Nara, and as a result, I began to study how religion and its artistic expression fits into modern life. My recent research features contemporary art and tourism, especially “Light Ups” (*son et lumière* shows) at temples. My wider interests are not limited to art and religious studies: I have worked with museums on their collections of the contemporary clothing designer Rei Kawakubo of *Comme des Garçons*, and published a book on *ukiyoe* (woodblock prints). In all, I am enthusiastically engaged by the richness of Japanese traditional and contemporary culture and craft.



My research: the bronze triad of Yakushi Nyorai (Medicine Master Buddha), 8th century, Yakushiji, Nara. With permission of Yakushiji

My Career and Vision

My career has been a road full of surprises and hard work. An early turning point was a study-abroad scholarship to Sydney, Australia during high school. I had never been on an airplane, let alone out of the country. It was 1974 and Australia had recently ended its all-white immigration policy. I already had an interest in Asian culture and languages, much to the amazement of my parents—there was not a single Asian face in my large high school nor in my neighborhood. In Sydney, I observed many Asian cultures and discovered that the Japanese language was taught in my girls’ school. At the age of sixteen, my eyes were opened to a world much larger than the Pittsburgh where I grew up. Although I studied geology and pre-engineering courses at college, my fascination with Asia deepened. I started my undergraduate degree at Carleton College but the attraction to Japan was greater than to the study of nearby glacial till. I went to Doshisha University (Kyoto), then transferred to Smith College to study

East Asian Buddhist art history. I took my MA and PhD at Harvard University in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture. From there, it has been a constant delight to pursue the study of ancient Japan. I was a museum curator, then a professor at the Universities of Washington and Oregon, for almost twenty years before moving to Kyushu University.



With my book at the Asia Society bookstore, New York

Message for Students

You will often hear, “follow your dreams,” but not everyone realizes how difficult that might be. You must work hard to do what you love. The satisfaction will be great if you succeed.



Oita prefecture temple field trip with Kyushu University graduate students and colleagues