



Jobbnorge ID: 296038
Deadline: 4/6/2026
Website: <http://www.uio.no/>
Scope: Fulltime
Duration: Fixed Term

Goddess worship in Japan and Taiwan

TWO DOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS IN EAST ASIAN RELIGIONS

Job description

Two Doctoral Research Fellowships (SKO 1017) in East Asian religions are available at the Department of Culture, Religion, Asian and Middle Eastern Studies ([IKOS](#)), University of Oslo.

Two fully funded PhD positions are available in the project "Maritime Goddesses: Transnational Connections, Blue Environments, and Ritual Care in East- and Southeast Asia" ([MARGO](#)), funded by the European Research Council (ERC). MARGO studies some of the most popular deities in the world and the ways in which people relate to them: Guanyin, Mazu, Benzaiten, and several other goddesses to whom people pray for protection and support. These goddesses are often associated with bodies of water (seas, oceans, rivers, and deltas). They can move, change shape, and transcend political and ontological boundaries. Although these goddesses are central to the ritual lives of billions of people, there has been little research on the ways in which people relate to them in everyday life.

MARGO offers a large-scale comparative, transnational, and multidisciplinary approach to goddess worship in Asia, focusing not on a single deity or tradition but comparing different practices across time and space. Its overarching questions are: 1) How have people in East and Southeast Asian places related to their goddesses in everyday life; 2) How do these goddesses relate to the larger maritime and riverine environments in which they are embedded; and 3) How have they travelled and changed in response to changes in their devotees' lives and environments?

The doctoral research fellows will each be responsible for one work package. Applicants should choose one of the two.

Project descriptions

PhD project 1

The River, the Snake, and the Lute: The Changing Meanings of Benzaiten

This PhD candidate will study the popular Japanese goddess Benzaiten, who is often associated with the Indian river goddess Sarasvatī. Benzaiten is arguably one of the most interesting deities in the country: she refuses to be classified as either Buddhist or Shinto, showing up at institutions belonging to both; she is associated with river creatures such as snakes and dragons, while also featuring in pacification rituals for animals killed for food or lab experiments; she is the patron goddess of artists and musicians, but also widely worshipped as a prosperity goddess (people literally wash their money in streams associated with her, hoping that it will yield profits). In other words, she embodies some of the core paradoxes of contemporary Japanese religion. This PhD project will lead to a monograph on modern and/or contemporary Benzaiten worship. Depending on the candidate's interests and expertise, it may consist of archival research, ethnographic fieldwork, or a combination of both. The candidate should be proficient in Japanese.

PhD project 2

Moving Mazu: Pilgrimage, Heritage Politics, and Smartphones

Every year, the Dajia Mazu pilgrimage in Taiwan keeps a significant proportion of the island's population occupied. This pilgrimage keeps growing and is now widely considered as one of the main expressions of Taiwanese cultural identity. But Taiwan is not the only place where Mazu is considered important national heritage. The PRC, too, lays claim to the tradition, and has made considerable attempts to turn Mazu's birthplace, Meizhou Island, into a pilgrimage destination. Meanwhile, pilgrims continue to have personal, affective relationships with Mazu. How do they experience these relations? Why do they matter to them? What kind of rituals do they engage in? And how do new technologies and media, such as smartphones and social media networks, transform pilgrimage practices? This PhD candidate will focus on contemporary Mazu worship in Taiwan, conducting ethnographic fieldwork with pilgrims, traders, temple caretakers, and other relevant actors. If possible, they will also join a group of Taiwanese pilgrims to Meizhou; if not, they will interview others who have made this trip. The candidate should be proficient in Chinese.

Applicants are required to upload a research proposal (hf.uio.no) stating research questions and theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as concrete case studies and sources.

Start date: 15 August 2026 (or soon thereafter).

More about the position:

The person appointed will be affiliated with the faculty's organized research training. The academic work is to result in a doctoral thesis that will be defended at the faculty with a view to obtaining the degree of PhD. The successful candidate is expected to join the existing research milieu or network and contribute to its development. Read more about the Doctoral degree: PhD in the Humanities (hf.uio.no).

The appointment is for a duration of 3 years. All PhD Candidates who submit their doctoral dissertation for assessment with a written recommendation from their supervisor within 3 years or 3 ½ years after the start of their PhD position, will be offered, respectively, a 12 or 6 month Completion Grant (hf.uio.no).

Qualification requirements

Mandatory requirements

- A Master's degree or equivalent in Asian studies, religious studies, social anthropology, or a related discipline. The Master's degree must have been obtained and the final evaluation must be available by the application deadline.
- Fluent oral and written communication skills in English (see Language requirements (hf.uio.no)).
- Good working knowledge of Japanese (for PhD project 1) or Mandarin Chinese (for PhD project 2). For project 2, knowledge of Hokkien is an added advantage.
- Personal suitability and motivation for the position.

To be eligible for admission to the doctoral programmes at the University of Oslo, applicants must, as a minimum, have completed a five-year graduation course (Master's degree or equivalent), including a Master's thesis of at least 30 ECTS. In special cases, the Faculty may grant admission on the basis of a one-year Master course following an assessment of the study programme's scope and quality. Applicants who have recently graduated with excellent results may be given preference.

Desired qualifications/competence

- Previous ethnographic fieldwork or other research experience (e.g., archival research), preferably in the region.
- Previous experience with academic writing. Candidates who have already (co-)published academic texts have an advantage.
- Other relevant academic experience (e.g., work as a research assistant, conference organisation, translation work, or teaching).

In assessing the [research proposal \(hf.uio.no\)](http://hf.uio.no), special emphasis will be placed on

- Quality and originality of the proposal.
- Familiarity with relevant literature.
- Feasibility of the proposed research.
- Suitability of the proposed methodological and theoretical approaches.

Personal skills

- Collaboration skills and willingness to work with others. MARGO is a group project that involves regular team meetings, seminars, and other collaborative work, so we seek candidates who enjoy being part of a team.
- Good communication and social skills.
- Creativity, flexibility, and perseverance.
- Good time management skills and the ability to work independently.

We need different perspectives in our work

UiO is an open and internationally oriented comprehensive university that strives to be an inclusive and diverse workplace and academic environment. You can read more about UiO's work on equality, inclusion, and diversity at uio.no.

We fulfill our mission most effectively when we draw upon our variety of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. We are looking for great colleagues—could you be the next one?

We will do our best to accommodate your needs. Relevant adjustments may include modifications to working hours, task adaptations, digital, technical, or physical adjustments, or other practical measures.

If you have an immigrant background, a disability, or CV gaps, we encourage you to indicate this in the job application portal. We always invite at least one qualified candidate from each group for an interview. In this context, disability is defined as an applicant who identifies as having a disability that requires workplace or employment-related accommodations. For more details about the requirements, please refer to the [Employer portal](#) (Norwegian).

The selections made in the job application portal are used for anonymized statistics that all state employers include in their annual reports.

More information about gender equality initiatives at UiO can be found [here](#).

We hope you will apply for the position with us.

We offer

- Salary in position as Doctoral Research Fellow, position code 1017 in salary range NOK from 550 800 - to 596 000 depending on competence and experience. From the salary, 2 percent is deducted in statutory contributions to the State Pension Fund.
- Exciting opportunity to participate in and contribute to an innovative, state-of-the-art research project, at one of Scandinavia's leading departments for East Asian studies, religious studies, and environmental humanities.
- Funding for fieldwork and conference travel.
- Membership in the [Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund \(spk.no\)](#), which is one of Norway's best pension schemes with beneficial mortgages and good insurance schemes.
- [Attractive welfare benefits \(uio.no\)](#)
- The successful candidates are expected to move to Oslo and make the Department their regular place of work for the duration of the appointment

Read more about the benefits of working in the public sector at [Employer Portal](#).

How to apply

The application must include:

- **Application letter** describing your qualifications and motivation for the position. Please mention for which of the two PhD positions you are applying in the subject line of the letter.
- **Curriculum Vitae** with a list of education, positions, teaching experience, administrative experience and other qualifying activities, including a complete list of publications.
- **Diploma and transcript of records** of your Bachelor's and Master's degrees.
 - For applicants with education from a Norwegian higher educational institution: Please retrieve your education results from Vitnemålsportalen.no. If your education results are not available through [Vitnemålsportalen](#), we ask you to upload copies of your Diploma and transcripts or grades.
 - Applicants with education from a foreign university: Please upload copies of your diploma in addition to copies of your transcripts or grades. You must also attach an official explanation of your university's grading system.
- **Project proposal**, including a detailed progress plan for the project (3 - 5 pages, maximum 14.000 characters. See [Template for project proposal \(hf.uio.no\)](#). The proposal must be written by the candidate. The use of AI-generated text is not allowed.
- If applicable: Documentation of English [Language requirements \(hf.uio.no\)](#). The appointed applicant will be asked to document these skills prior to admission to the PhD programme.
- **One writing sample written by the candidate**. This can be an MA thesis, a journal article, a book review, a term paper, or a popular-scientific text (e.g., blog post or newspaper article) written within the last five years. The writing sample can be about any topic; it does not have to be related to the theme of the PhD project.

Please note that all documents must be in English or a Scandinavian language.

Application with attachments must be submitted via our recruitment system Jobbnorge.

Short-listed candidates will be invited for an interview.

General information

The best qualified candidates will be invited for interviews.

Applicant lists can be published in accordance with [Norwegian Freedom of Information Act](#) § 25. When you apply for a position with us, your name will appear on the public applicant list. It is possible to request to be excluded from this list. You must justify why you want an exemption from publication and we will then decide whether we can grant your request. If we cannot, you will hear from us.

Please refer to [Regulations for the Act on universities and colleges chapter 3](#) (Norwegian), [Guidelines concerning appointment to post doctoral and research posts at UiO](#) and [Regulations for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor \(PhD\) at the University of Oslo](#).

The University of Oslo has a [transfer agreement](#) with all employees that is intended to secure the rights to all research results etc.

University of Oslo

Department of Culture, Religion, Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (abbreviated IKOS from its Norwegian name) is one of the seven departments at the Faculty of Humanities. The Department has a broad competency in the study of religion and culture and in language based area studies of South Asia, East Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. IKOS also hosts the Oslo School of Environmental Humanities. The Department has several study programmes at both BA and MA levels. Among the Department's 110 employees about 40 are PhD and Postdoctoral Fellows.

Additional information

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