



Introduction to Japanese Culture

JAPA 240 Spring 2020

Tuesday and Thursday, 3:00PM – 4:15PM
Aquia Building Room 213

This introductory survey class covers Japanese history, culture, and society from prehistory until the present day. It is designed to familiarize students with the fundamental aspects of Japanese culture that inform contemporary viewpoints and social issues. Students will learn to identify and understand important people and events as they acquire the skills to read a range of texts and documents within their historical contexts.

In this class we will investigate the concept of “Japanese culture” and how it is created, recreated, and canonized. We will examine various political, economic, and religious systems with our twenty-first century bias, but we will also attempt to imagine how these systems were perceived by the people who created and experienced them. Our understanding of history will be augmented and challenged by our reading of historical documents, religious texts, and works of popular entertainment. The ultimate goal of this course is to provide a foundation of basic knowledge about Japan that will serve as a springboard for future engagement with the nation, its people, and its cultural legacy.

Instructor Information

Dr. Kathryn Hemmann
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Aquia Building Room 326

Course Texts

Brett L. Walker, *A Concise History of Japan*

Kohei Horikoshi, *My Hero Academia*, Vol. 1

Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon*, Vol. 1

Grading and Assignments

Five Quizzes: 50%

Final Exam: 20%

Presentation: 15%

Participation: 15%

Five Quizzes

There will be five short quizzes, all of which will be given on a Thursday. Each quiz will last approximately ten minutes and will feature three to five term definitions and one or two short answer questions. Each quiz will test all the material covered in class since the last quiz, including the reading assigned for the day of the quiz. If a student misses a quiz for any reason, they will be required to submit a short reading response paper (of roughly 500 words) before the next class meeting in order to receive credit.

Quiz Dates

Thursday, February 6

Thursday, February 20

Thursday, March 5

Thursday, March 26

Thursday, April 9

Final Exam

The in-class final exam will feature seven to ten short answer questions and a choice of two essay questions. The short answer questions should be answered in two or three sentences, while the essay question should be answered in at least three paragraphs. Students will be able complete the exam using the knowledge they have gained from the course readings and discussions. The exam will be held on the final day of class, **Thursday, April 30**, and blue books will be provided. For students requesting disability accommodations, the exam date will be Wednesday, April 29. A review guide will be distributed on Tuesday, April 21, and there will be an opportunity for students to ask questions during the course conclusion session on Tuesday, April 28.

Class Presentation

Each student is expected to make a five-minute presentation on a topic of their choice that relates to premodern, modern, or contemporary Japan in some way. The goal of this presentation is to explain your topic to the class in a clear and concise manner with an emphasis on why the topic is important to our understanding of Japanese culture. These presentations will be graded according to a four-point rubric: (1) clarity, or ability to convey content, (2) impact, or ability to demonstrate why the project is interesting and important, (3) appropriate use of visual aids, and (4) ability to handle questions and comments. Plan on using a PowerPoint slideshow or some other type of visual aid, but try not to include more than 30 to 45 seconds of video. These presentations will be scheduled on Thursdays throughout the semester. No group presentations are allowed.

Participation

Students are expected to complete all required reading assignments and to be attentive during class lectures and discussions. Repeated lack of preparation will significantly lower the participation grade, as will a demonstrated lack of respect for the instructor or the other students. If a student is uncomfortable or otherwise unable to speak in class, alternate methods of performance evaluation can be arranged by means of a consultation with the Office of Disability Services. Class participation grade is graded according to the following rubric:

- A – Strong participation, student contributes at least once or twice during each class.
- B – Fair participation, student contributes perhaps once or twice a week.
- C – Minimal participation, student does not contribute regularly but attends class.
- D – Poor participation, student does not contribute or attend class regularly.
- F – No participation, student does not attend class.

Course Policies*Required Readings*

This class follows a set structure in which Tuesday classes will focus on content lectures while Thursday classes will revolve around discussions of primary source texts. Students are required to complete all assigned readings. Although it is not necessary to bring the textbook to Tuesday classes, it is highly recommended that students bring a physical copy of the appropriate reading to each Thursday class. With the exception of the textbook and the two graphic novels, all assigned reading will be available on the course website on Blackboard.

Attendance

Each student is allowed **two unexcused absences**, no questions asked and no excuses necessary. If you would like to excuse an absence, you must submit at least one form of written proof of legitimacy (photocopies, printouts, and forwarded emails are fine)

within three days of your absence. **Each unexcused absence after the second will result in half a letter grade being deducted from your final course grade**, in addition to a reduction of your participation grade. Please be aware that obligations for other classes (such as exams, mandatory group work, and study sessions) do not count as valid excuses, even if they are scheduled during our class time. If such a conflict arises, please notify the professor to reschedule the commitment. Showing up to class more than fifteen minutes late will count as an absence. If a student misses a quiz due to an absence, they will be required to submit a short reading response paper (of roughly 500 words) before the next class meeting in order to receive credit.

Technology

Tablets are permitted in their capacity as e-readers, but **laptop computers are absolutely not allowed** without a formal letter from the Office of Disability Services. **Smartphones are not allowed for any reason**. If I see you using your smartphone in class, I will mark you as absent for that class period and lower your participation grade accordingly.

Disability Accommodation

The Office of Disability Services has strict guidelines concerning the submission of accommodation requests. If your registered disability enables you to receive a specific accommodation on a class assignment or evaluation, please submit the appropriate paperwork to me in advance of the deadline, which is generally a week before the assignment due date or scheduled evaluation date. If you feel that I am not being properly sensitive to your disability, please let me know, and please don't hesitate to suggest a meeting with your officer at the ODS. I am firmly committed to helping you succeed.

Cheating and Plagiarism

I have a zero-tolerance policy for cheating and plagiarism. If you submit work that isn't your own for any assignment for any reason, you will fail the class, and I will report you to the Honor Committee, which may result in your expulsion from the university. Both cheating and plagiarism are remarkably easy to catch, so please don't try it. The evaluations for this class are designed to be relatively low-stress and to reward students for their engagement, and you should not feel that cheating is necessary.

Respect

Each student is expected to be respectful of the instructor and their peers. No speech or behavior demonstrating or encouraging discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, age, body shape, neurodivergence, or physical disability will be tolerated. Cultural essentialism, or the reduction of a large and diverse group of people to a set of stereotypes, is offensive and counter to the purpose of this course. The uncritical reproduction of any of these types of discourses in written or oral class assignments will be harshly penalized.

Week One: Myths of Origin

Tuesday, January 21

Course Introduction

Thursday, January 23

Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, Chapter Two: Unifying Traditions, Cosmological Perspectives and the Vitalistic Universe

Week Two: Continental Culture

Tuesday, January 28

History of Japan, Chapter One: The Birth of the Yamato State

Thursday, January 30

Sources of Japanese Tradition, Chapter 3: Prince Shōtoku and His Constitution

Week Three: A Crepuscular Golden Age

Tuesday, February 4

History of Japan, Chapter Two: The Courtly Age

Thursday, February 6

The Tale of Genji, “Yūgao: The Twilight Beauty”

+ **Quiz #1**

Week Four: The Rise of the Samurai

Tuesday, February 11

History of Japan, Chapter Three: The Rise of Samurai Rule

Thursday, February 13

The Tale of the Heike, selections

Week Five: Buddhism and the Aesthetics of Impermanence

Tuesday, February 18

History of Japan, Chapter Four: Medieval Japan and the Warring States Period

Thursday, February 20

Japanese Nō Dramas, “Atsumori”

+ **Quiz #2**

Week Six: Feudal Warlords and Transnational Exchange

Tuesday, February 25

History of Japan, Chapter Six: Unifying the Realm

Thursday, February 27

Sources of Japanese Tradition, Chapter Nineteen: The Regime of the Unifiers, pp.433-40 and pp.458-72

Week Seven: Two Hundred Years of Peace

Tuesday, March 3

History of Japan, Chapter Seven: Early Modern Japan

Thursday, March 5

Bashō Matsuo – *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*
+ **Quiz #3**

* * * SPRING BREAK * * *

Monday, March 9 – Sunday, March 15

Week Eight: An Alternative Modernity

Tuesday, March 17

History of Japan, Chapter Eight: The Rise of Imperial Nationalism

Thursday, March 19

Masterpieces of Kabuki, “Kasane”

Week Nine: Civilization and Enlightenment

Tuesday, March 24

History of Japan, Chapter Nine: Meiji Enlightenment

Thursday, March 26

Ōgai Mori, “The Dancing Girl”
+ **Quiz #4**

Week Ten: The Pacific War

Tuesday, March 31

History of Japan, Chapter Thirteen: The Pacific War

Thursday, April 2

Kyoko Hayashi, "Masks of Whatchamacallit: A Nagasaki Tale"

Week Eleven: Japan, Inc.

Tuesday, April 7

History of Japan, Chapter Fourteen: Japan's Post-War History

Thursday, April 9

Kohei Horikoshi, *My Hero Academia*, Vol. 1

+ **Quiz #5**

Week Twelve: The Girls Who Leapt Through Time

Tuesday, April 14

David Pilling, *Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival*, Chapter Eleven: From Behind the Screen

Thursday, April 16

Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon*, Vol. 1

Week Thirteen: Global Environments and Mediascapes

Tuesday, April 21

History of Japan, Chapter Fifteen: Natural Disasters and the Edge of History

Thursday, April 23

Sayo Yamamoto and Jun Shishido, *Yuri!!! on Ice*, Episode One: Easy as Pirozhki!! The Grand Prix Final of Tears

Week Fourteen: Reimagining "Japan"

Tuesday, April 28

Course Review and Conclusion

Thursday, April 30

Final Exam