Cultures & Contexts: Japan (CORE UA-507)

Course Syllabus

Description

In modern times, what does it mean to be truly free? Are we compelled to surrender our freedom to the state in exchange for its protection, or is there a more authentic way to retain freedom over our own lives beyond the tentacles of the state and its pervasive institutions? This is the central question that drives our inquiry into modern Japan.

On the one hand, Japan’s emergence into modern statehood since 1868 has been impressive. It has been admired as the first “non-Western” state to defeat a “Western” state in the Russo-Japanese War, a formidable imperial power that colonized and occupied most of Asia by World War II, and a miraculous economic behemoth that rose from ground zero to the second largest in the world by the 1970s. On the other hand, these achievements would not have been possible without first constructing and negotiating the boundaries between individual autonomy and state sovereignty. In the shadow of Japan’s illustrious achievements lurks sophisticated technologies of colonial rule, unspeakable wartime atrocities, and social pressures that have led to a staggering suicide rate.

Specifically, this course will examine the existential crisis of freedom in modern Japan through Natsume Soseki’s iconic novel Kokoro, how the Japanese Marxist tradition problematized the relationship between the state, capital, and the possibility for resistance through Old Left and New Left literature such as Kobayashi Takiji’s Crab Cannery Ship and Abe Kobo’s Woman in the Dunes, the complicated relationship between the state and colonial Korean subjects through Kim Sa-ryang’s Into the Light, and the ambiguous lives of Okinawans dominated by a transnational network of sovereignty between the U.S. and Japan that concentrates U.S. military bases in their islands through Medoruma Shun’s In the Woods of Memory. Although this class revolves around award-winning works of Japanese literature, it draws on a rich number of interdisciplinary resources from economics, history, philosophy, and sociology. It provides historical context, theoretical structure, and filmic reference to the study of the literary works, and reads them closely through the lenses of gender, sexuality, race, and class.

Cultures and Contexts is intended to prepare you for life in a globalized world. Through critical engagements with primary cultural materials, it introduces you to ways humans come to understand themselves as members of social, religious, national, and regional collectives, and with the dynamics of cultural interaction and influence. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, it is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society.
**Requirements and Grades**

1) **Midterm and Final Exams:** The midterm and final exam will come directly from terms and concepts covered in the readings and in lecture. Questions will not be given in advance and you will not be able to use notes or texts during the exam. (The midterm is 15% and final exam is 25% of your grade)

2) Papers are to be submitted to NYU Classes under the “Assignments” Tab by the indicated deadline.

   Three 2-Page Double-Spaced Exegeses: An exegesis is an interpretative summary of the text. You should *in your own words* unpack key concepts and summarize the overall argument. While including short quotations is encouraged, it should reflect the essence of your point and be free of excess. Be careful to avoid a “cut-and-paste” approach that reads as if you are simply re-arranging the author’s words without understanding them yourself. You should also refrain from including your own opinion. The aim is to test your understanding of the text and ability to reproduce the arguments on your own terms. These are the foundational skills for writing an analytical paper. Specifications are listed on NYU Classes under the “Assignments” tab. (10% of final grade)

   Two 4-Page Double-Spaced Analytical Papers: Using skills acquired from exegetical writing, demonstrate how the theoretical texts can enhance interpretation of the literary/filmic texts. Successful papers will quote from both the essays and literary text. The aim is to train you to read secondary literature on a literary/filmic text and refer to it when the analyzing the text. Specifications are listed on NYU Classes under the “Assignments” tab. (15% of final grade)

   Two 6-Page Double-Spaced Argument Papers: Using the skills acquired from exegetical and analytical writing, write a paper that includes 1.) use of theoretical text(s); 2.) one or more literary/filmic text(s); 3.) an original thesis statement. Specifications are listed on NYU Classes under the “Assignments” tab. The thesis statement should appear in your opening paragraph and be demonstrated throughout. You are encouraged to express your opinion and are free at this point to agree or disagree with any of the texts we have used in class provided that you do so responsibly. Although not required, you are welcome to refer to texts not used in class. (25% of final grade)

3) **Attendance:** Attendance to lecture and recitation is mandatory. After two absences, your grade will go down one full letter. More than three absences will result in an automatic failing grade even if you have completed all other course requirements.

4) **Participation:** You are expected to arrive to class punctually and fully prepared to contribute. This means you have completed the readings, bring your texts to class, complete the written assignments on time, and ready to participate with thoughts and questions. Although some of the readings are available online, studies show that reading printed hard copies enable deeper comprehension. (10% of your grade)

5) Papers must be submitted on time to ensure that appropriate feedback can be given in the recitation sections. Failure to submit work by the assigned due date without documentation of a legitimate cause will result in penalty toward your participation grade. Additionally,
there will be no make-up exams without documentation of a legitimate cause of absence such as a documented illness.

6) In-class use of electronic devices (iPhone, iPad, laptops, etc.) is discouraged. Please print out your online readings so you can refer to a hard copy in class.

**READINGS**

The following texts are available at the NYU Bookstore.


The following texts are available online at NYU Library.

The following texts are available on NYU Classes under the “Resources” tab.

The following texts are available online.

The following film can be found on NYU classes under the “Resources” tab.

The following film can be found on NYU Library’s website.
Teshigahara, Hiroshi. *Woman in the Dunes* (1964)

**Grading Scale**
Grading will be assessed on a 4.00 scale. A+=+4.00, A=4.0; A-=3.7; B+=3.3; B=3.0; B-=2.7; C+=2.3; C=2.0; C-=1.7; D+=1.3; D=1.0; F=0.0.

**Academic Integrity**
Plagiarism consists of presenting ideas and words without acknowledging their source and is an offense against academic integrity. Plagiarism and cheating on exams automatically entail a 0% grade for the assignment and possibly the entire course. Please refer to the University’s Code of Academic Integrity for more details: [https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html](https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html)

**Make-up and Late Submission Policy**
Make-up exams and late paper submissions are not allowed without official documentation of an illness.
SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Week 1
September 5: Introduction

Week 2

*September 13: EXEGESIS #1 DUE BY 11:55 AM.

Week 3
September 17: Sōseki, Kokoro, 1-166.
September 19: Sōseki, Kokoro, 166-248.

Week 4
September 24: Film: Chushingura 1/47.
September 26: Karatani, “The Discovery of Interiority,” 45-96. (lecture by Amy)

*September 27: EXEGESIS #2 DUE BY 11:55 AM.

Week 5

*October 4: EXEGESIS DUE #3 BY 11:55 AM.

Week 6
October 8: Fall Recess
October 9 (legislative day): Abe, Woman in the Dunes, 3-241.
October 10: Watch film in class and finish in Recitation: Women in the Dunes (148 minutes).

*October 11: ANALYTICAL PAPER #1 DUE BY 11:55 AM.

Week 7
October 15: Midterm Review
October 17: Midterm Exam

*No Recitation section.

Week 8
October 22: Tosaka, “The Fate of Japanism,” 59-68; Johnson, 3-34.

Week 9

**Week 10**
November 14: Film: Go!

*November 15: ANALYTICAL PAPER #2 DUE BY 11:55 AM.

**Week 11**
November 21: Thanksgiving Recess

**Week 12**

*November 29: ARGUMENT PAPER #1 DUE BY 11:55 AM.

**Week 13**
December 5: Medoruma, *Into the Woods of Memory*, 104-213; Watch film *Invisible War* in class and finish in Recitation (98 minutes).

*December 6: ARGUMENT PAPER #2 DUE BY 11:55 AM.

**Week 14**
December 10: Final Course Review
December 12: Final Exam

*No Recitation Section
COURSE GUIDE

Week 2

1.) When reading the Goto-Jones chapter, think about the differences between power that stems from military conquest and authority that stems from the religious aura of the emperor. Can you think of a correlate in the context of European history?

Key terms and concepts:
1. Commodore Matthew Perry
2. Black ships (黒船)
3. Unequal Treaties
4. Baku (幕府)
5. Oda Nobunaga (織田信長)
6. Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣秀吉)
7. Tokugawa Ieyasu (徳川家康)
8. Bakuhan taisei (幕藩体制)
9. Sankan kōtai (參勤交代) or alternate attendance
10. Shi-nō-kō-shō system (士農工商)
11. Akō incident (赤穂事件)

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Naoki Sakai (1946- ) is one of the most prominent Japanese studies scholars still teaching in the U.S. today. He is known for introducing Kyoto School Philosophy to Anglophone audiences and for his work on translation theory. The text we are reading comes from *Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse*, which represents his early work.

1.) What kind of social contexts can you image might be behind the philosophies of Zhu Xi and Itō Jinsai?
2.) For Itō Jinsai, why must one “make oneself vulnerable to the accidental, to the otherness of the Other” in order to be sincere?

1. Zhu Xi (朱熹)
2. Itō Jinsai (伊藤仁斎)
3. Song rationalism
4. Body of enunciation (主体)
5. Ai (愛)