

**UA 507**  
**CULTURES & CONTEXTS: INTRO TO JAPANESE CULTURE**  
Mon/Wed (Time/Place TBA)

Instructor: Tom Looser  
Office: 19 University Place, 516  
Tel: 998-7619  
TL27@nyu.edu  
Office Hours: Thurs. 1:00-3:00

Overview: This class is designed to give a general, comparative, introductory overview of Japanese culture, including both contemporary concerns and conditions, and some of the fundamental historical transformations that “Japanese” culture has undergone. It proceeds in part chronologically, and in part thematically, providing a sense of the shifts in cultural history, and the way cultural categories (from “family,” to the idea and effects of capitalism as a mode of social organization, and so on) as the course develops. The aim is to provide students not only a comprehensive view of the changing forces that have shaped what we call Japanese culture, but also to offer grounds by which to reflect on our own condition(s) that may or may not be comparable.

Readings: To be posted on NYU Classes.

Required readings should be read prior to lectures. Recommended readings may be helpful—it is not expected that you will have read any of these, but material from them may be covered in class. Suggested readings (sometimes substantial) are provided simply for those who might be interested in further reading on a given topic.

Method of Evaluation:

Two short take-home papers (5 pp. each), and one in-class midterm, one in-class final (exams are essay responses, with a short quiz of key vocabulary terms/ideas from the lectures; key terms will be noted at the start of each lecture). Students are expected to come to lectures and recitations having done all required reading, and three unexcused absences will be grounds for failing the course.

2 papers: 25% each

Midterm & final: 20% each

Participation: 10%

Week 1:

1. Introduction (the idea of the Japanese)

•Suggested: Nakane Chie, *Japanese Society* (selection)

2. “Japanese” mythologies

•Movie: *Princess Mononoke*

•Napier, “Princess Mononoke: Fantasy, the Feminine and the Myth of Progress”

•Recommended: Amino, “Emperor, Rice, and Commoners”

## I. Consistencies of State: Before the Nation

### Week 2:

1. From Mythologies, Towards the Bakuhan System: Geographies of State
  - *Manyôshu* (poems 1-6)
  - Tale of Genji (Chapts. 1-3, 17)
  - Recommended: • *Kojiki* (pp. 37-53)
2. “Economics”: Permanent Cycles, Fixed Value (Samurai/nobility)
  - Zeami, “Matsukaze,” “The Reed Cutter” (nô plays)
  - J. W. Hall, “The Bakuhan System” (in *Cambridge History of Japan*, Vol. 4)
  - Recommended: T.C. Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan* (Chapts. 2, 8)
  - Suggested: Looser, *Visioning Eternity*, Chapts. 2, 3.
  - Suggested: Osamu & McClain, “The Commercial & Urban Policies of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi”
  - Suggested: Shively, “Sumptuary Regulation & Status in Early Tokugawa Japan”

### Week 3

1. The Mercantile Knowledge of Capital: from *Ukiyo* to *Ukiyo*, and Madness & Excess
  - Saikaku, *The Japanese Family Storehouse* (short selection)
  - “Sukeroku” (kabuki play)
  - Recommended: Shikitei Sanba, *Ukiyoburo* (“The Bathhouse”)
  - Suggested: Shively, “Bakufu vs. Kabuki”
  - Suggested: Looser, *Visioning Eternity*, Chapt. 4.
2. Early Modern Japan as Confucian? Epistemologies of State
  - Ogyu Sorai, “Bendo” (“A Discourse on the Way”)
  - Kamo Mabuchi, “Kokuiko” (“Ideas on the Meaning of the Realm”)
  - Dazai Shundai, “Keizai Roku Shui” (“Thoughts on Political Economy”)
  - Furai Sanjin, “Hohiron” (“On Farting”)
  - Recommended: Shiba Kôkan, “Discussion of Western Painting”
  - Recommended: *Practical Pursuits: Takano Chôei & Western Medicine*, pp. 1-13.
  - Suggested: Sharf, “Zen and Japanese Nationalism”

### Week 4

1. The End of the Early Modern
  - Movie (clips): *Eijanaika*
  - Wilson, “Plotting Bakumatsu History”
  - Review, and **FIRST PAPER** prompt distributed

## II. National Culture

### 2. Fragmentation and “Restoration”: the Meiji State

- Film: *The Meiji Revolution: Asia’s Response to the West*
- Borthwick et al, *The Pacific Century*: “Meiji Japan in the Age of Imperialism”
- Fukuzawa Yukichi, “Goodbye Asia” (2 pp.)
- Recommended: Fukuzawa, “Western Civilization as Our Goal”
- Suggested: Mary Elizabeth Berry, “Was Early Modern Japan Culturally Integrated?” in *Beyond Binary Histories*

### Week 5

#### 1. Feb. 20 (Holiday: President’s Day)

#### 2. The Culture of Modernity: Beauty, West, and East

- Tanizaki, “In Praise of Shadows”
- Recommended: Elisa Evett, “The Critical Response: A Survey of General Reactions to Japanese Art”
- Suggested: Nishi Amane, “Writing Japanese with the Western Alphabet”

#### •FIRST PAPER DUE

### Week 6

#### 1. The Japanese Folk

- Harootunian, “Figuring the Folk”, in *Mirror of Modernity*
- Yanagita, *Japanese Folk Tales: The Tales of Tono* (short selection)
- Suggested: Marilyn Ivy, “Ghastly Insufficiencies,” in *Discourses of the Vanishing*
- Suggested: Kohl, *The White Birch Society*
- Suggested: Kikuchi, “Appropriation of Orientalism: The formation of Mingei theory...”

#### 2. The Emperor System, 1

- Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque* (Ch 4)
- Maruyama Masao, “From Carnal Literature to Carnal Politics”

### Week 7

#### 1. Family Japan (and the Emperor System)

- Norma Field, “The Child as Laborer and Consumer: The Disappearance of Childhood”
- Schodt, “Regulation vs. Fantasy”, in *Manga Manga*
- Suggested: Wilber M. Fridell, “Family State”

2. MIDTERM (in class)

— SPRING RECESS —

Week 8

1.

- Movie: *Family Game*
- Recommended: Murakami, “Family Affair”

2. Visiting Speaker: Kazuhiro Soda, Documentary Filmmaker (on postwar Politics)

Week 9

1. Economics of the Postwar; Memory, Peace and Protest

- Norma Field, *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor*, Ch. 3, Epilogue
- Suggested: Lisa Yoneyama, “Memory Matters: Hiroshima’s Korean Atom bomb Memorial and the Politics of Ethnicity”
- Suggested: Atkins, “Bop, Funk, and that Old Democracy Boogie: Jazz Tribes in Postwar Japan”

2. Nuclear Modernities: The postwar

- Movie: *Godzilla*
- Hara Tamiki, “Summer Flower”
- Ibuse Masuji, “The Crazy Iris”
- Recommended: Igarashi, “The Bomb, Hirohito, & History”

III. National Culture II: Other Japans

Week 10

1. Gendering Japan: Women, Desire, Work

- Junichiro Tanizaki, “Aguri”
- Sharon Sievers, “The Early Meiji Debate on Women”
- Recommended: “The Woman Who Admired Vermin”
- Recommended: Tsushima Yuko, “The Marsh”
- Recommended: Movie, “Kamikaze Girls”
- Suggested: Barbara Sato, “Commodifying and Engendering Morality”
- Suggested: Ueno Chizuko, “The Position of Japanese Women Reconsidered”

2. Species, Ethnicity, and Nationality: Eta, Burakumin & “Korean” Residents

- Nagahara, “The Medieval Origins of the Eta-Hinin”
- “The History of Koreans in Japan,” and “Alien Control”
- Recommended: “Survivors Tell Their Stories”—selection from *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women*

## Week 11

### 1. The Place of Okinawa, and the Ainu

- Oshiro Tatsuhiro, “The Cocktail Party”
- Richard Siddle, “Ainu History: An Overview”
- Uemura Hideaki & Sakai Mina on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights
- Recommended: Winchester, “On the Dawn of a New National Ainu Policy”
- Suggested, Walker, *The Conquest of Ainu Land* (Epilogue)
- Suggested: Hudson, “Japanese Ethnicity: Histories of a Concept,” in *Ruins of Identity*
- SECOND PAPER** prompts distributed

### 2. New Religions

- Shimazono Susumu, “In the Wake of Aum”
- “New Religions,” in *Mangajin*

## IV. Beyond Modernity and Tradition

## Week 12

### 1. Mass Cultural Consumption (and the Postmodern)

- Marilyn Ivy, “Tradition and Difference”
- Jennifer Robertson, “It Takes a Village: Internationalization and Nostalgia in Postwar Japan
- Recommended: Murakami Haruki, “Family Affair”
- Suggested: Tansman, “Mournful Tears and Sake: The Postwar Myth of Misora Hibari”
- Suggested: Yoshimoto, “Real Virtuality”
- SECOND PAPER DUE**

### 2. National Identities, Double Identities (Hybridities & Transnationalities)

- Rumiko Takahashi, *Ranma 1/2* (manga)
- Recommended: Iwabuchi, “Localizing ‘Japan’ in the Booming Asian Media Markets”
- Recommended: Masao Miyoshi, “A Borderless World?”
- Suggested: Nakano Yoshiko, “Who Initiates a Global Flow? Japanese Popular Culture in Asia”
- Suggested: Shiraishi, “Japan’s Soft Power: Doraemon Goes Overseas”
- Suggested: Yumiko Iida, “Back to Identity”
- Suggested: Kelsky, “Flirting with the Foreign: Interracial Sex in Japan’s ‘International’ Age”

### Week 13

#### 1. From Nations to Networks

- Movie: *Ghost in the Shell* (or, *Akira*)

#### 2. Subcultures: Tribal / Post-tribal Japan, the Otaku...

- LaMarre, "Otaku Movement"
- Ueno Toshiya, "Techno-Orientalism and Media-Tribalism"
- Ishida Ira, "Ikebukuro West Gate Park" (short story)
- Mori Yoshitaka, "New Art and Culture in the Age of *Freeter* in Japan"
- Recommended: •Hayashi & McKnight "Goodbye Kitty Hello War: the Tactics of Spectacle and New Youth Movements in Urban Japan"

### Week 14

#### 1. Post 1990's, Post 3/11 (Fukushima) (Nuclear Modernities 2)

- Iida, "Japan in the 1990's and Beyond"
- Recommended: *Tekkon Kinkreet*
- Recommended, Rosenbluth, "Japan's New Political Economy" (Chs. 7 & 8)
- Suggested: McCormack, "Dismantling the Japanese Model"
- Suggested: Tanaka, "Nuclear Power Plant Gypsies in High-Tech Society"
- Suggested: Kang, "In Range of the Critique of Orientalism"
- Suggested: Iyotani, "The Modern World System and the Nations of the Periphery"

#### 2. Post Fukushima, Cont.

- Sakaguchi, *The Zero Yen House* (selection)
- A. Allison, "Ordinary Refugeeism," in *Precarious Japan*
- Looser, "Still City Crisis," in *Boundary 2*
- Recommended: K. Iwata-Weickgenannt, "Beyond 3/11 or 'Living Fukushima'"

Finals Period: Final exam