Japanese Culture in Translation: Modern Japanese Fiction and Film

Time: TTH 2:15-4:05   Room: ARH 314
Instructor: Kenji Takahashi
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Office Hours: M: 2:00-3:00  W: 3:00-4:00  F: 4:00-5:00

Course Description

This course initiates you to modern and contemporary Japanese fiction and film. The instructor will introduce some fiction and film produced by Japanese people for Japanese, and we will consider these materials as mediums of accessing various aspects of modern and contemporary Japanese culture and society. We will focus on modern and contemporary materials, but a small portion of the fiction and film that we will consider will not portray modern or contemporary Japan. In the first half of the semester, we will primarily read some Japanese literature that has been written since the Meiji Restoration in 1868. In the second half of the semester, we will mainly watch Japanese movies that have been produced since the 1950’s. Class discussions will be emphasized to exchange ideas and thoughts about the fiction and film that will be considered in the course.

Course Objectives

To become familiar with modern contemporary Japanese fiction and film;

To understand the religious and historical backgrounds of it;

To understand it as reflecting aspects of modern and contemporary Japanese society and culture;

To develop a further interest in modern and contemporary Japanese fiction and film.

Course Materials

Videos
We will watch the following videos to understand the religious and historical backgrounds of modern and contemporary Japan:

   Japan: The living tradition
   Japan: The changing tradition

Textbook

This book is available at the bookstore. We will read most of the stories in the book and have class discussions based on those stories.

**Articles**

We will read the following articles to better understand two of the movies we will watch:


**Fiction**

Besides the textbook, you will read three novels from the lists of works below for a summary paper, a fiction paper, and a class presentation. Each one of the underlined works can be read for a summary paper only. All the following works are on reserve at Burling Library.

**Fiction Written in the Meiji Period**

From the list of novels below, you will choose and read one for a paper or class presentation.

Futabatei, Shimei. (1887-1889). *Drifting cloud*.
Izumi, Kyoka. (1900). *The saint of Mt. Koya*.
Natsume, Soseki. (1906). *Botchan*.
Shimazaki, Toson. (1906). *The broken commandment*.
Mori, Ogai. (1911-1913). *The wild goose*.
Natsume, Soseki. (1914). *Kokoro*.

**Fiction Written in the Taisho and Pre-war Showa Periods**

From the list of works below, you will choose and read one for a paper or class presentation.

Tanizaki, Jun’ichiro. (1925). *Naomi*.
Kawabata, Yasunari. (1926). *The dancing girl of Izu*.
Tanizaki, Jun’ichiro. (1933). *The story of Shunkin*.
Kawabata, Yasunari. (1937). *The snow country*.

**Fiction Written in the Post-war Showa Period**

From the list of works below, you will choose and read one for a paper or class presentation.

Yoshimoto, Banana. (1982). Kitchen,

Film
You will write a paper about a movie of your choice. With the exception of Ugetsu, you can choose any one of the movies you will watch in or outside the classroom. The movies we will watch in class are the following:

Suo, Masayuki. (1996). Shall we dance?

We will discuss the following movies and watch small portions of them in class. You can watch each one of these movies entirely outside the classroom. They are on reserve at the AV center or Burling Library.
Ozu, Yasujiro. (1953). Tokyo story (Burling).

Evaluation
In this course, each grade will fall in the following ranges:

A : 94.5-100
A- : 89.5-94.4
B+: 86.5-89.4
B : 82.5-86.4
B- : 79.5-82.4
C+ : 74.5-79.4
C : 69.5-74.4
D : 59.5-69.4
F : 0-59.4

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Attendance (20%)
Because of the emphasis placed on discussion in this course, attendance will be very important. You can get the following credit depending on your attendance.

- Three absences or less: 20%
- Four or five absences: 16%
- Six or seven absences: 12%
- Eight or nine absences: 8%
- 10 or 11 absences: 4%

Assignment (20%)
You will come up with one question for each one of the 14 short stories in Donald Keene’s book we will discuss in the course and six of the movies we will watch in class. Write down your questions on a sheet of paper and give it to the instructor at the beginning of the class meeting. These questions will be used for our classroom discussions. As long as you turn in your questions, you can get all credit. Each question is worth one point. The stories in Donald Keene’s book and the movies for which you have to submit questions are underlined in the course schedule.

Summary Paper (10%)
You will read one of the novels listed above and write a summary of it in two pages (double-spaced). This summary will be read by all your classmates for class discussion. Make copies of your summary for your classmates. This paper is due on April 2. The criterion of evaluation will be the clarity of presentation.

Class Presentation (20%)
You will give your class a presentation on one of the novels listed above. Tell your class in 15 minutes what kind of story it is, how you feel about it, etc. Finally, tell your classmates if you can recommend them the novel. You will give your presentation after the spring-semester recess. The clarity of presentation and the strength of arguments will be the criteria for evaluation.

Fiction Paper (15%)
You will read one of the novels listed above and write a paper expressing your opinion of it. Discuss how you feel about the people and society depicted in the novel as an American or non-Japanese person. Write at least three pages (double-spaced). This paper is due on April 30. Your paper will be evaluated in terms of strength of arguments and clarity of presentation.

Film Paper (15%)
You will write about the movie you like best of all the ones you will watch in class or outside. Discuss how you feel about the people and society depicted in the movie as an American or non-Japanese person. Write at least three pages (double-spaced). This paper is due on May 14. Your paper will be evaluated in terms of strength of arguments and clarity of presentation.
As you work on your discussion leading, presentation, and each paper, you can ask yourself the following questions:

What does the author of a novel or the director of a movie intend to portray primarily?
What does the novel or movie tell you about Japanese individuals and society?
What are the concepts that are portrayed in the novel or movie?
Can you find American or your own cultural parallels to those concepts?
Can you or can you not relate to the individuals that are depicted in the novel or movie?
Why can you or can you not relate to the individuals that are depicted in the novel or movie?
Would you act the same way as the main character in the novel or movie if you were in the same situation?

Course Schedule

**Week 1**

**Day 1** Explanations about the course.

**Day 2** Religious background of Japan (video).
Introduction to the short stories in Keene’s book considered in the course.

**Week 2 (Film)**

Mizoguchi, Kenji. Ugetsu.

**Week 3 (Meiji Literature)**

**Day 1** Historical background of the pre-Meiji period (video).
Historical background of the Meiji period (video).
Kanagaki, Robun. The beafeater.
Hattori, Busho. The Western peep show.

**Day 2** Introduction to the Meiji literature considered in the course.
Kawatake, Mokuami. The thieves.
Furtabatei, Shimei. The Drifting Cloud (excerpt).

**Week 4 (Meiji Literature)**

**Day 1** Higuchi, Ichiyo. Growing up.
Natsume, Soseki. Botchan (excerpt).

**Day 2** Shimazaki, Toson. Broken commandement (excerpt).
Tayama, Katai.  *One soldier.*
Mori, Ogai.  *The wild goose* (excerpt).

**Week 5 (Film)**

**Day 1**  Introduction to the movies that can be watched outside the classroom:  *The Snow Country, Tokyo Story, The Woman of the Dunes,*

**Day 2**  Introduction to the movies that can be watched outside the classroom:  *MacArthur’s Children, The Funeral,* and *Tampopo.*

**Week 6 (Taisho Literature)**

**Day 1**  Historical background of the Taisho period (video).
Kikuchi, Kan.  *The madman on the roof*

**Day 2**  Introduction to the Taisho literature considered in the course.
Shiga, Naoya.  *At Kinosaki.*
Kume, Masao.  *The tiger.*

**Week 7 (Film)**

Kumai, Kei.  *Sandakan No.8: Bokyo.*

**Week 8 (Showa Literature)**

**Day 1**  Historical background of the Showa period (video).
Yokomitsu, Riichi.  *Time.*
Hino, Ashihei.  *Earth and soldiers.*

**Day 2**  Introduction to the Showa literature considered in the course.
Dazai, Osamu.  *Villon’s wife.*
Hayashi, Fumiko.  *Tokyo.*

**Week 9-10 (Spring-semester recess)**

**Week 11**

**Day 1**  Presentations

**Day 2**  Presentations and discussion about summary papers

**Week 12 (Film)**
Kurosawa, Akira. *Ikiru*.

**Week 13 (Film)**

Morita, Yoshimitsu. *The Family Game*.

**Week 14 (Film)**

Kurotsuchi, Mitsuo. *Traffic jam*.

**Week 15 (Film)**

Itami, Juzo. *Minbo*.

**Week 16 (Film)**

Suo, Masayuki. *Shall we dance?*