Japanese Culture Through Film

(ANTH 3709/ JAPN 3162)

Overview:

The aim of this class is to study aspects of Japanese culture through 1.) reading and discussing works of scholarship and journalism about Japanese values, beliefs, and customs; 2.) critically viewing cinematic works made in Japan, and 3.) analyzing how these films critique, celebrate, or otherwise depict their cultural contexts. It is important to keep in mind that while films provide us with an unparalleled view into how people think, feel, and act in various environments and circumstances, they are works of art rather than unfiltered records of actual lives. We must therefore be attuned to filmmakers’ individual approaches and creative innovations, in addition to the worldviews of the characters they depict in their films. Rather than asking how ‘accurately’ Japanese culture is depicted in any given film, we should think about why each film depicts the world as it does. Paying attention to these multiple, overlapping perspectives will provide us with a fuller understanding—and a deeper enjoyment—of how films represent Japanese culture.

We should also be aware that there are numerous modes of experiences and identities in different sectors of Japanese society, and we should thus refrain from drawing reductive and essentialist conclusions about ‘Japanese-ness’ at large. That said, there are certain shared understandings, relational dynamics, and values that pervade Japanese society and define its unique parameters. Reading assignments will help us to grasp and study these concepts. Discussions will help us synthesize and explore our findings. Throughout the course, we will consider the broad question of what ‘culture’ means, and what we can learn by appreciating cultural differences.

Class will begin with a lecture/discussion and occasionally a quiz, followed by a screening of a film. Attendance is mandatory. Any student who cannot attend class will be expected to view the movie on his/her own time. No prior knowledge of Japanese culture or the Japanese language, or prior exposure to film studies or the study of anthropology, is required.

Objectives:

Throughout the semester, participants of this course will be exposed to a wide variety of Japanese films and learn the larger context of Japanese history, religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and ongoing social issues. Through completing the reading assignments and engaging with the weekly lectures/discussions, students will gain familiarity with Japanese ideas and circumstances, and then analyze these in terms of their cinematic representations. Also, students will develop the comparative perspectives and vocabulary necessary for the critical analysis and constructive discussion of cultural productions in a global context.

Requirements and Grading:

Weekly response postings

Participation in discussions

Quizzes
Two papers

Group presentation

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory, except with a verifiable and documented reason—religious holiday, illness with a doctor's note, accident with police report, University athletic event, etc. Please see the University Policies on Attendance as stated by the Office of the Registrar. ([http://registrar.gwu.edu/university-policies#attendance](http://registrar.gwu.edu/university-policies#attendance)) If you will be missing class for any foreseeable reason (such as religious holidays or university events), please let me know **within the first two weeks of class.** When you miss class with an excused absence, you are still responsible for the work you missed. (You will need to watch the film/ make up missed quizzes before the next class.)

I will either take roll or pass around an attendance sheet in class. **You are allowed TWO absences for the semester, after which you will be deducted a full letter grade (e.g., A to B, B to C, etc.) from your final grade for each additional absence.**

**Grade Scale:**

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<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Letters</th>
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<tr>
<td>94-100</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>90-93</td>
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<td>87-89</td>
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<td>84-86</td>
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**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:** University policies concerning academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced, and students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with these regulations. ([http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html))

**Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:**

To request disability accommodations, students should contact the Office of Disability Support Services ([http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss](http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss)), (202)-994-8250 (TDD/voice).

**Office Hours:** W 5:00-6:00, R 2-3, or by appointment.
Required Texts:


Articles in pdf form, posted on Blackboard under “Readings”.

SCHEDULE <subject to change>:

**Week 1.** 8/27. Introductions.

**Week 2.** 9/3. Picturing the Past.

**Week 3.** 9/10. The Family Unit.

**Week 4.** 9/17. Local Communities and Social Order.

**Week 5.** 9/24. Women at Work, Home, and Beyond.

**Week 6.** 10/1 Men at Work, Home, and Beyond.

**Week 7.** 10/8. School and Life.

**Week 8.** 10/15. Multiple Japanese-ness.

Week 10. 10/29. Life and Death Rituals.

Week 11. 11/5. Law and Outlaws.


Week 13. 11/19 TBD.

Week 14. 11/26. No Class. Happy Thanksgiving!!

Week 15. 12/3. Student Presentations.