

Japanese Cultural History: Ancient and Medieval

Section 1

Instructor	David Eason
Office/Building	Room 1412 (Building 1)
Office Hours	TBA

【Course Outline / Description】

This course offers a survey of Japanese cultural history from the time of the earliest known human settlements on the archipelago during the Paleolithic Era up until the end of the so-called “Age of the Country at War” circa 1600. We will focus on a number of major developments that took place during this extended period, placing a particular emphasis first on the creation of a centralized government before then proceeding to a detailed examination of the gradual, uneven transition from courtier to warrior rule that later followed. In addition we will also analyze how these larger institutional shifts both shaped and were shaped by the cultural practices developed and maintained by various individuals who lived during these tumultuous times.

Just as importantly, although we will focus on Japan, in this course we will also explore the larger question of what it means to pursue the study of cultural history. To this end we will read and discuss a wide variety of translated primary sources that range from legal texts and letters to less official materials such as war tales and poetic travel diaries. Moreover, we will also spend substantial time viewing and analyzing visual materials that include maps, paintings, and picture scrolls.

All of these items will provide fodder for regular activities and discussions. As a result, through activities pursued both individually and in groups, we will engage in a process of active learning that goes far beyond simply memorizing the contents of a staid and uninspiring textbook.

Section 2

【Course Objectives/Goals/Learning Outcomes】

To acquire an ability to read and analyze materials produced in cultural contexts far removed from our own present-day concerns.

To recognize that the study of history is not simply the act of memorizing a series of seemingly obscure names, dates, and events, but that it rather entails careful and critical thinking about the kinds of evidence we use in order to make informed arguments about the past.

2024 Fall Semester

To gain an awareness of the various methods employed by historians for taking discrete, particular examples in order to make claims to truth and to advance arguments concerning larger historical trends and processes.

To be able to communicate clearly the ways in which different aspects of Japanese culture have developed, persisted, and in other cases changed over time.

To learn to know better than to ever again think that Japanese history is populated by an exclusive cast made up solely of gorgeous geisha, nefarious ninja, and sword-waving samurai.

Section 3

【Class Schedule/Class Environment, Literature and Materials】

Meeting 1 – Introductions	No Assigned Reading
Meeting 2 – Earliest Sources	Read – Barnes, “Japan’s Natural Setting” and Vincent, “History and Evidence”
Meeting 3 – Ancient Inhabitants	Read – Aikens, “Origins of the Japanese People”
Meeting 4 – Deities Big and Small	Read – Borgen and Ury, “Readable Japanese Mythology”
Meeting 5 – Center and Periphery	Read – Barnes, “The Emergence of Political Rulership”
Meeting 6 – Continental Philosophy	Read – Batten, “Early Japan and the Continent”
Meeting 7 – Capitals and Cosmology	Read – Coaldrake, “Great Halls of Religion and State”
Meeting 8 – Ritual Considerations	Read – Adolphson, “Aristocratic Buddhism”
Meeting 9 – The Season for Poetry	Read – Borgen and Sorenson, “The Canons of Courtly Taste”
Meeting 10 – Life at Court	Read – Wallace, “Contexts and Pre-Texts of Early Heian Memoirs”

2024 Fall Semester

Meeting 11 – Public and Private Power	Read – McCullough, “The Fujiwara Role in Japanese Court History”
Meeting 12 – Disaster and Response	Read – Sato, “The Early Development of the Shōen”
Meeting 13 – Life in the Provinces	Read – von Verschuer, “The Provinces and the Public Economy”
Meeting 14 – Belated Reforms	Read – Friday, <i>The First Samurai</i> , Ch. 2
Meeting 15 – Fact and Fiction	Read – Varley, “The Tale of the Heike”
Meeting 16 – Age of the Samurai	Read – Goble, “The Kamakura Shogunate”
Meeting 17 – Kamakura Buddhism	Read – Goodwin, “Building Bridges and Saving Souls”
Meeting 18 – The Mongol Invasions	Read – Segal, “Kamakura and the Challenges of Governance”
Meeting 19 – Restoration and Rebellion	Read – Goble, “Go-Daigō, Takauji, and the Muromachi Shogunate”
Meeting 20 – Violence in the 1300s	Read – Conlan, “The Nature of Warfare in 14 th -Century Japan”
Meeting 21 – Authority and the Arts	Read – Chance, “Medieval Arts and Aesthetics”
Meeting 22 – Bakufu, Take Two	Read – Gay, “Muromachi Rule in Kyoto”
Meeting 23 – The Ōnin War	Read – Keene, <i>Yoshimasa and the Silver Pavillion</i> , Ch. 1 & 3
Meeting 24 – New Communal Norms	Read – Keirstead, “The Rise of the Peasantry”
Meeting 25 – Artistic Exodus	Read – McCormick, “Genji Goes West”
Meeting 26 – Trade and Piracy.	Read – Shapinsky, “Predators, Protectors, and Purveyors”

2024 Fall Semester

Meeting 27 – Regional Rule	Read – Arnesen, <i>The Medieval Japanese Daimyo</i> , Ch. 6
Meeting 28 – Re-Unification, Part 1	Read – Watsky, “Commerce, Politics, and Tea”
Meeting 29 – Re-Unification, Part 2	Read – Pitelka, “Famous Objects”
Meeting 30 – Continuity and Change.	Read – Butler, “The Sixteenth-Century Reunification”

【Textbooks/Reading Materials】

All assigned readings will be posted and made available to students through the course webpage on Blackboard.

Section 4

【Learning Assessments/Grading Rubric】

Reading Response Assignments

(Responses required for 10 out of 12 readings, valued at 4% each)	- 40%
Map Assignment	- 5%
First Writing Assignment	- 15%
Second Writing Assignment	- 25%
Class Activities and Discussion	- 15%

The following 100-point scale will be used for determining final grades in the class:

97-100=A+; 93-96=A; 90-92=A-; 87-89=B+; 83-86=B; 80-82=B-;

77-79=C+; 73-76=C; 70-72=C-; 67-69=D+; 63-66=D; 60-62=D-; 0-59=F.

Work not turned in will be counted as a zero (0). Absent an official, documented excuse, work cannot be turned in late nor made up.

Plagiarism, work written by artificial intelligence, or any other form of cheating will result in not only a zero (0) for that assignment, but an overall class score of zero (0) as well.

Class participation will consist of asking and answering questions during both group and class discussions. For this reason regular class attendance is essential.

There is no extra credit offered in this course. Please do not ask me for any.

2024 Fall Semester

Section 5

【Additional Information】

Rather than rely on a single textbook, assigned readings for this class will be drawn from a variety of different sources, copies of which will be made available to you online through our course webpage on Blackboard.

Reading responses should be submitted through Blackboard by or before noon (12:00pm) on the day they are listed as due in our class schedule. They should be written in response to the assigned reading for that day. Assignments submitted late will, as a rule, not be accepted. Reading responses should consist of a minimum of two substantial but not interminably long paragraphs, each devoted to a particular purpose.

The first paragraph should aim to provide an overview of the main argument(s) made in the assigned reading and further include a summary of both the key points and accompanying evidence presented by the author in support of his/her/their claims.

This should then be followed by a second paragraph that provides you with an opportunity to offer your own detailed analysis of the assigned reading. Focus here on whether or not you found the author to be effective in presenting and proving their case based upon the structure and content of the argument. Feel free, moreover, to comment upon the style and clarity of the author's writing, as well as to mention whether the assigned reading generated any questions, problems, or lingering doubts in your mind that you wish to note.