

# Japanese Cultural History – Ancient and Medieval

Spring 2023

- Instructor: Dr. David Eason  
Associate Professor (Japanese History)
- Class Meetings: Monday 4<sup>th</sup> Period, 3:00-4:30pm  
Location – Building 3, Room #3405
- Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> Period, 3:00-4:30pm  
Location – Building 3, Room #3405
- Office Hours: 3<sup>rd</sup> Period on Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:15-2:45pm,  
as well as by appointment (either in person or online  
through Zoom – Meeting ID: 696 567 3108 )
- Email Address: [davidaeason@gmail.com](mailto:davidaeason@gmail.com)

## Course Overview

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, with a particular emphasis on the creation of a centralized government and the gradual, uneven transition from courtier to warrior rule that accompanied and further complicated this shift. In addition, we will also analyze how these larger trends influenced some of the specific cultural practices developed and maintained by people 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.

## Course Goals

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.

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 entirely of gorgeous geisha, nefarious ninja, and sword-waving samurai.

## Grading Guidelines

### 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 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 contributing to online group and class discussions held live through Zoom, as well as using Blackboard to submit surveys, think pieces, and post to our class discussion board as directed.

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

## Assigned Readings and Reading Response Assignments

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 8am 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.

## Class and Assignment Schedule

Meeting #	Date	Day	Course Topic	Assignments
1 回	1/25	Wed.	Introductions	
2 回	1/30	Mon.	Earliest Sources	* Response #1 Due *
3 回	2/1	Wed.	Ancient Inhabitants	
4 回	2/6	Mon.	Deities Big and Small	* Response #2 Due *
5 回	2/8	Wed.	Center and Periphery	
6 回	2/13	Mon.	Continental Philosophy	* Map Assignment Due *
7 回	2/15	Wed.	Capitals and Cosmology	* Response #3 Due *
8 回	2/20	Mon.	Ritual Considerations	
9 回	2/22	Wed.	The Language of Love	
10 回	2/27	Mon.	Life at Court	

Meeting #	Date	Day	Course Topic	Assignments
1 1 回	3/1	Wed.	Public and Private Power	* Response #4 Due *
1 2 回	3/6	Mon.	Disaster and Response	
1 3 回	3/8	Wed.	Life in the Provinces.	* Response #5 Due *
1 4 回	3/13	Mon.	Belated Reforms [Online Class]	
1 5 回	3/15	Wed.	Fact and Fiction [Online Class]	* Response #6 Due *
	3/20	Mon.	<b>No Class</b>	
	3/22	Wed.	<b>No Class</b>	
1 6 回	3/27	Mon.	Kamakura Courts	
1 7 回	3/29	Wed.	Popular Buddhism	* Response #7 Due *
1 8 回	4/3	Mon.	The Mongol Invasions	* <b>1<sup>st</sup> Assignment Due</b> *
1 9 回	4/5	Wed.	Restoration and Rebellion	
2 0 回	4/10	Mon.	Violence in the 1300s.	* Response #8 Due *
2 1 回	4/12	Wed.	Authority and the Arts	
2 2 回	4/17	Mon.	Bakufu, Take Two	
2 3 回	4/19	Wed.	The Ōnin War	* Response #9 Due *
2 4 回	4/24	Mon.	New Communal Norms	
2 5 回	4/26	Wed.	Artistic Exodus	* Response #10 Due *
2 6 回	5/1	Mon.	Trade and Piracy	* Response #11 Due *
	5/3	Wed.	<b>No Class</b>	
2 7 回	5/8	Mon.	Varieties of Regional Rule	
2 8 回	5/10	Wed.	Re-Unification, Part 1	* Response #12 Due *
2 9 回	5/13	Mon.	Re-Unification, Part 2	
3 0 回	5/15	Wed.	Continuity and Change	
			<b>5/22 ~ 5/26 Final Exam Period</b>	* <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Assignment Due</b> *