In the Western imagination, the terms “middle ages” and “medieval” often conjure up images of backwardness and stagnation. In contrast, Japan pulsated with political, economic, and cultural creativity during its chūsei epoch (中世時代) from the end of the twelfth century to the middle of the sixteenth. This course will use Kyoto as a focal point to explore key topics central to Japan’s medieval revolution: (•) the construction of new forms of political authority, namely the samurai-led shogunate that shared power with the Heavenly Sovereign and court aristocracy, (•) the advent of fresh cultural norms, centering on warrior values and the ethos of the detached hermit, (•) the appearance of Zen and popular Buddhist religious sects, (•) the intersection of noh performances and the innovative “Zen arts” (specifically the tea ceremony, landscape gardening, ink painting, and flower arranging) with samurai governance as an expression of rule through “soft-power,” (•) the emergence of commoners as wielders of economic and cultural influence, and (•) the destruction of Kyoto and its subsequent resurgence in the sixteenth century as a city shared by aristocrats, warriors, merchants, and artisans.

In addition to expanding our knowledge of the medieval period — especially as expressed in the centrality of the urban experience to the unfolding of Japanese history — this course embraces the following overarching goals:

- To deepen our understanding about the complex interrelationships between political, economic, and cultural transformations;
- To broaden exposure to diverse methods of assessing the past, with an emphasis on historical analysis but including multiple other disciplines;
- To foster a sophisticated interpretation of historical and other primary sources;
- To promote unbiased, thoughtful critiques of scholarly interpretations;
- To hone writing skills through a variety of essay assignments, with the aim of refining our ability to engage with complex causal analysis and to articulate arguments that integrate supporting evidence and analytical commentary;
- To sharpen oral communication skills by providing opportunities to articulate our views in a public forum, listen to the perceptions and insights of others, and use the intellectual exchange to refine and expand our knowledge of the Japanese past;
- To gain insight into how men and women in the modern era have remembered and interpreted the medieval past in order to define “Japaneseness” and to construct guidelines and justifications for their own beliefs and behaviors;
- To learn how to view the world from perspectives other than our own.
TOPICS AND READINGS

You are expected to read and to think about the assignments according to the following schedule. In advance of each meeting (or set of related meetings), I will distribute handouts listing readings, topics for consideration, a chronology, and a guide to important persons, institutions, and events.

The medieval period has a complicated set of chronological subdivisions. The scholars you will read pick and choose from the following:

- Kamakura period, 1185-1333
- Kenmu Restoration, 1333-1336
- Nanbokuchō (Northern and Southern Courts) epoch, 1336-1392
- Muromachi (Ashikaga) period, 1336-1573
- Kitayama epoch, late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries
- Higashiyama epoch, second half of fifteenth century
- Sengoku (A Country at War), 1478-1568
- Reunification (Azuchi-Momoyama epoch), 1568-1600

The Kamakura Epoch

The introductory segment of the course (January 11~27) spans the period from the late twelfth century to the 1330s. Significant historical and cultural developments include (a) the entrance of the samurai onto the stage of Japanese history, (b) a refashioning of governance designed to grant the samurai a share of authority with the Heavenly Sovereign and court nobility, (c) the calculated creation of warrior-centered cultural norms, and (d) a new prominence for Zen and the so-called popular religions.

January 11: Welcome: To a time and place

Topics:
- Course content and expectations
- Histriographic issues
- Historical themes, seventh to fourteenth centuries
- Is the medieval period still alive in contemporary Japan?

Recommended Reading:
- John W. Hall, Japan: From Prehistory to Modern Times, ch. 7 (“The Feudal Age”), pp. 75-102 only (“The Bushi and the Kamakura Shogunate.”)

January 13: The new medieval political order (discussion and presentation with Q&A)

Discussion topic:
Historiographic issues
The Genpei Wars
Establishing the Minamoto (Kamakura) shogunate

Readings for discussion:

Topics for presentation with Q&A:
Historiographic issues revisited
The Genpei Wars
Establishing the Minamoto (Kamakura) shogunate

Readings for discussion:
The Tale of the Heike, Helen Craig McCullough, tr., “Introduction” (pp. 1-11); pp. 23-30 only of chapter 1; chapter 4 (pp. 130-64); and ch. 6 (pp. 197-223) — do not worry about remembering every single detail, but, instead, try to focus on key events, the chronology of the Taira rise to power, and the varying characterizations (scholarly vs literary) of the Taira warriors and how they ruled Kyoto.

January 18: The new samurai cultural ethos (discussion and presentation)
Topics:
Samurai men
Samurai women
Readings:
The Tale of the Heike, chapter 11 (pp. 358-400), pp. 30-37 (“Giō”) of chapter 1, and “The Initiates Chapter” (pp. 426-38); again, the details can be staggering, but try to focus on the depiction of warrior ethos.
Heike monogatari (dvd; Kawamoto Kihachirō, NHK Productions, 2003).
Karl Friday, Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan, ch. 5 (“The Culture of War”), pp. 135-63.

January 20: Zen…and the warrior ethos (presentation and discussion)
Topics:
- Zen comes to Japan
- Core beliefs
- The monastic life
- Kōan and enlightenment

Readings:
- Ekai (also known as Mumon; fl early thirteenth century), “The Gateless Gate” (transcribed by Nyōgen Senzaki and Paul Reps), in Reps, comp., Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, pp. 110-61; browse the section and bring in your personal favorite for discussion.
- Eiheiji (dvd; Takeuchi Saburō, NHK documentary, 1977).

★★★★ January 20-21: Special class activity — overnight stay at a Zen temple

★★★★ January 25: Reflections on the monastic life (field-trip summation)
- The eccentric tradition (discussion)

Topics:
- Reflections
- Eccentrics: Who opted “out” and what ideas did they contribute about being “in”?

Readings:
- Japanese History and Literature, part 2 (“Medieval Japan and Buddhism in Literature, 1185-1600”) (dvd; Project on Asia in the Core Curriculum of Schools and Colleges, Columbia University, 1996).

★★★★ January 27: The popular religious sects (presentation with Q&A)

Topics:
- Commoner society and popular religion
- Charismatic founders and sectarian teachings
- Jōdo Shinshū, The True Pure Land Sect
- What was “popular” about popular religion?
Readings:
James C. Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan*, ch. 3 (“Shinran and His Teachings”), pp. 21-44.

The Muromachi Epoch

During second segment of our journey (February 1 ~ March 17), we will traverse the period from the 1330s until the end of the fifteenth century. In particular, we will investigate (a) the Mongol invasions and the fall of the Kamakura shogunate, (b) the rise of the Ashikaga family and the reconfigured political and economic underpinnings of shogunal rule, (c) the flamboyant Kitayama culture that flourished under the patronage of Yoshimitsu, and (d) the administration of Yoshimasa and the more subdued, Zen-influenced Higashiyama cultural flowering.

February 1: Retrospectives, on-the-spot reports, Preludes (discussion and reports)

Topics:
- What have we learned so far?
- Out-and-about reports.
- What’s next?

February 3: Establishing Ashikaga authority (presentation with Q&A)

Topics:
- Historical themes, c.1336~1500
- The Mongol invasions
- The early Ashikaga shoguns
- Regional warrior families

Readings:

February 8: Yoshimitsu and Kitayama ostentation (presentation with Q&A, discussion)

Topics:
What innovations did Yoshimitsu undertake, and how did he change the conception of the office of shogun?
How did Yoshimitsu use monumental architecture to enhance his prestige and authority?
A consideration of “soft power” and the concept of cultural hegemony

Readings:

February 10: Class visit to Kinkakuji and the temple Tōjin

February 15: Performance art in the Age of Yoshimitsu (presentation and discussion)

Topics:
Noh as history
Noh as drama

Readings:
Thomas B. Hare, *Zeami’s Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*, ch. 1 (“A Documentary Biography”), pp. 11-38.


The noh portion only of *The Traditional Performing Arts of Japan: Kabuki, Noh, and Bunraku* (dvd; Funatsu Hajime, Shin-Ei, 2005).

*Atsumori* (video recording; in Japanese with subscript; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mXuGC16ix4).

★★★★ Special class activity: Attend a noh performance, the date and venue will depend on theater bills

★★★★ February 17: No class (KCJS Spring Trip on February 17-18)

★★★★ February 22: Reflections on monumental architecture, performance art, and “soft power” (field-trip summation and discussion)

★★★★ February 24: From Yoshimitsu to Yoshimasa, Kinkakuji to Ginkakuji, the grandiose to the understated (presentation with Q&A)

Topics:

Yoshinori…

Yoshimasa…

…regional lords…

…and the hoarfrost of the fifteenth century

Readings:


Hayashiya Tatsu’saburō with George Elison, “Kyoto in the Muromachi Age,” in John W. Hall and Toyoda Takeshi, eds., *Japan in the Muromachi Age*, pp. 15-25 only.

*** March 1: No class (KCJS Spring Break)

*** March 3: No class (KCJS Spring Break)

March 8: The “Zen Arts”: Tea (presentation with Q&A)

Topics:
From beverage to ritual
From staying awake to staying “elite”

Readings:

March 10: The “Zen Arts”: Gardens (presentation and discussion)

Topics:
Ryōanji and Daitokuji

Readings:

March 15: The “Zen Arts”: Decorative and fine arts (presentation and discussion)

Topic:
Interiors
*Sumie*: Landscape paintings
*Ikebana*: From floral arrangements to *The Way of Flowers*
Readings:
Tanaka Ichimatsu, Japanese Ink Painting: Shubun to Sesshu, ch. 4 (“Sesshu, a Painter Outside the Academy”), pp.105-29.

March 17: Class visit to Ginkakuji

The Muromachi Epoch

The final leg of the course (March 22 ~ April 14) will carry us into the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Here, our focus will shift to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the last towering medieval figure, and the lived experiences of the common people, especially in Kyoto but also in nearby Osaka and Sakai.

March 22: Retrospectives, on-the-spot reports, Preludes (discussion and reports)
Topics:
What have we learned so far?
Out-and-about reports.
What’s next?

March 24: Kyoto under siege (presentation with Q&A)
Topics:
The Ōnin Wars (1467-1477)
Urban violence
Coping…and even prospering

Readings:
Hayashiya Tatsusaburō with George Elison, “Kyoto in the Muromachi Age,” in John W. Hall and Toyoda Takeshi, eds., Japan in the Muromachi Age, pp. 25-34 only.
Mary Elizabeth Berry, The Culture of Civil War in Kyoto, ch. 2 (“Dancing is Forbidden: The Structures of Urban Conflict”), pp. 55-105.

March 29: Hideyoshi’s wars (presentation with Q&A)
Topics:
Reunifying Japan
Invading Korea

Readings:
*Ran* (乱); directed by Kurosawa Akira (黒澤明) and starring Nakadai Tatsuya (仲代達矢).
*Samurai Japan: A Journey Back in Time* (dvd; Cromwell Productions, 2000).

March 31: Class visit to Toyokuni Shrine, Hideyoshi’s grave, and the infamous *Mimizuka* (耳塚; “Mount of Ears”)

April 5: An urban florescence and the voices of commoners (field-trip summation and presentation)

Topics:
Sakai
Osaka

Readings:
*Rikyū* (利休), directed by Teshigahara Hiroshi (勘使河原宏), 1989.

April 7: Hideyoshi’s Kyoto… (discussion with Q&A)

Topics:
The warrior’s footprint

Readings:
Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Hideyoshi*, ch. 7 (“The Pursuit of Legitimacy”), pp. 168-205, and pp. 228-36 only of ch. 8 (“The Last Years”).

April 12: …people’s Kyoto (presentation and on-the spot reports)
Topics:
The commoners’ city
Enduring legacies

Readings:
James L. McClain, “The Gion Festival” (manuscript and images).

April 14: Reflections
さよなら

What did we learn?
The relationship between medieval culture and modern Japan
The contribution of *Medieval Kyoto • Medieval Japan* to a liberal education.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

In pursuit of the objectives enumerated at the beginning of this syllabus, *Medieval Kyoto • Medieval Japan* incorporates the following assignments and modes of assessment. Additional details about each undertaking will be provided on separate handouts at the appropriate time.

Q&A segments: As noted on the syllabus, approximately one-half of the classes combine a presentation with a question and answer segment. During the Q&A, students are expected to demonstrate engagement with the assigned readings and films by (a) asking pertinent questions designed to clarify complicated points and open up our understanding of that today’s subject and (b) volunteering responses to the queries posed by others. In addition, each student will have an opportunity to conduct a Q&A or discussion segment (see below).

Discussion segments: During other meetings, time is set aside for conversations about specified topics (which will be announced in advance). Everyone should be prepared to participate in these discussions, and each student will have an opportunity to preside over one of them (or Q&A session).

Essay assignments: All students will complete a scholarly essay for each of the three major chronological divisions of the course. The three assignments include (a) a historical essay, (b) a critique of a film or work of fiction, and (c) an “on-the-spot report”. The topics for the historical essay will be distributed in advance, and the responses should be approximately five pages in length. For one of the other sections of the course for which a student does not write a historical analysis, s/he is to submit a five-page critique of a film or work of fiction assigned for that section. For the remaining chronological division, teams of students will report to
the class about a visit to a historical site of their choosing associated with the course and submit a thee-page summary of the experience.

Field-trip summation: As specified in syllabus, we will embark on several field trips and discuss our experiences in the class meeting following the outing. Students will form teams to lead these discussions and then will submit a written review of the excursion, focusing on what it added to our understanding of the medieval epoch and Japan’s historical experience.

Merit performance: Students who demonstrate acquisition of knowledge and mastery of the material beyond the norm and/or steadily improve their performance over the semester will receive extra consideration that amounts to a maximum of 5 percent of the course grade.

Course grade:

The final course grade will be calculated as follows:
- Quality of contributions to Q&A sessions: 25 percent
- Quality of contributions to discussions: 25 percent
- Historical essay: 10 percent
- Critique of film/work of fiction: 10 percent
- “On-the-spot” report: 20 percent
- Field-trip summations: 10 percent
- Merit consideration: 5 percent

Alternative project:

Some of you may wish to propose an alternative project that serves to advance your own particular interest in medieval Japan. I welcome your suggestions in this regard.

Academic Code:

Students in this course are expected to adhere to the norms expressed in the Participation Agreement concerning the quality and originality of their work. If anyone has not yet done so, s/he should consult that document.

Accommodations:

Anyone who believes that s/he has a disability that requires accommodation should contact the appropriate official at his/her home institution or Columbia’s Disability Services (disability@columbia.edu; 212-854-2388). Students who have an Accommodation Letter issued by the home institution or Columbia’s Disability Services should contact the course instructor to discuss specific arrangements.