

## Gender and Identity in Japanese History and Culture

Prof. Caitlin Casiello  
(she/her/hers)

Class: Tuesday Friday 1:10-2:40

Office hours: TBA

course website: TBA

### Brief Course Description:

This course provides a survey of Japanese history and culture through the lens of gender as a special topic. Taking as given the feminist theoretical proposition that gender roles are partly determined by time and place, we look at a number of moments in Japanese history to explore how gender was constructed, how it was expressed, and how it transformed in each instance. Topics discussed include classical literary culture and gendered writing practices, the potential of a “third gender” in medieval literature and other forms of gender variance, sex work in Edo, gendered performance in Kabuki, masculinity and samurai culture, feminist analysis of the clan system, modern literature and women writers, and contemporary debates on gender, family, and sex.

### Course Objectives:

1. Learn about the history of Japan and gain broad familiarity with different modes of literary and cultural production throughout Japanese history.
2. Conduct research on Japanese history and culture using sources effectively.
3. Analyze gender as a category of human experience shaped by different cultural and historical norms in Japanese history.

### ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly Postings (250 words)

By class on Friday

Midterm paper (4-6 pages)

TBD

Research Presentation (10 minutes)

Will be scheduled in class

Research Paper (6-8 pages)

TBD

1. **Participation:** Class will be heavily based on participation of the students. The goal is to practice thinking out loud expressing ideas about media with colleagues (your fellow students.) Besides participating in class discussion, we can discuss alternative forms of participation such as leading discussion (preparing questions, presenting on a reading) for one class session, meeting with me in office hours to discuss, or contributing additional comments on the class forum (replies to other students.)
2. **Weekly Postings** (around 250 words): a short reflection on the screenings or readings due by midnight the night before class on the course website. The goal is to show you have thought about the screenings and materials; I will not be grading these except to confirm you submitted them. I will be using them to see what is confusing or difficult, so please ask questions.

3. **Midterm paper** (4-6 pages): For this paper, you will write on one of the works we have in class up to the due date. You may build on one of your weekly postings or use the midterm paper as a jumping-off point for the final paper as long as you submit the sufficient amount of new writing.
4. **Research Presentation** (5 minutes + 1-2 page notes on project): A presentation of your ideas leading up to the research paper. We will schedule 1-2 per class session starting in the latter half of the course. Each student will submit a 1-2 page reflection afterwards. The goal is to practice presenting ideas orally in front of colleagues and to get feedback on your final paper project.
5. **Research paper** (10-12 pages): You will write a paper which makes an argument based on research about a work related to class themes. The goal is to show you can conduct research in this field, analyze sources, and craft an argument based on texts which shows your unique point of view. If you would like to propose an alternative format (video essay, creative assignment), please speak to me and we will work out a balanced way of demonstrating course objectives in your new format.

## **GRADES**

20% Participation  
10% Weekly Postings  
20% Midterm paper  
20% Presentation  
30% Final Paper

## **POLICIES**

**Accessibility:** The course will be designed to encourage many forms of engagement for students of different abilities. I encourage you to speak to me if you feel you need accommodations to fully participate in coursework. If you have a disability that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the objectives of this course, please contact the university's office for disability services.

**Attendance & Participation:** Students are expected to attend all course meetings and screenings. Participation grades will be based on engagement in class, but I am open to other forms of participation (e.g. if you lead discussion one session, if you respond to your classmates' weekly postings, if you email me questions about course material or come to office hours to discuss.)

**Classroom Environment:** All students should be respectful of each others' experiences and perspectives. I will intervene when discussions could cause harm to attendees based on racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, or anti-religious bias. I hope we can all learn new things from each other as a community.

**Content Warnings:** Many of the works discussed will feature violence and difficult scenes; I will endeavor to warn for sexual violence, racist violence, and self-harm/suicide both in writing (on the syllabus and course page) and verbally in lecture. These warnings are given so that all students may be able to fully participate in the course. Let me know if you think my warnings are insufficient.

**Reporting Sexual Violence:** If you have experienced sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking or sexual exploitation on campus or between members of the community, the university provides resources, both confidential and nonconfidential, to help. Faculty (including myself), staff, and other people in supervisory roles (including RAs) are mandatory reporters, which means we must report all allegations of the above-listed crimes to Columbia University's Title IX office; the Title IX office will then reach out to offer options for how to proceed. If I believe you are about to make an allegation, I will stop you to confirm that you are aware I cannot keep the conversation confidential.

**Electronics in Class:** You are allowed to use devices to take notes in class and to Google-check me if you feel the need to. I won't be policing electronics usage, but you will get more out of the class if you focus on the class (seems obvious, I know.)

**Email & Contact:** All communication will be through the course website or to your university email addresses, so check them. I am available via my university email address. I will be sure to respond to emails within 1-2 business days.

**Grading & Feedback:** Grading in humanities disciplines is often subjective; I will endeavor as much as possible to offer guidance and explanation for grades given. As part of this process, I will ask you to grade your own progress as well at certain points during the semester. Similarly, I will provide feedback forms for you to comment on my progress during the semester. I am happy to give extensions on deadlines if you ask before the deadline and I am also happy to give students the opportunity to rewrite and resubmit work for a better grade.

**Plagiarism & Academic Integrity:** I encourage students to discuss course materials with each other and I am open to many forms of collaborative work if proposed to me ahead of time. However, written assignments must be the student's own work and use of sources must be correctly cited. We will go over correct citations and when to cite sources in class but I encourage you to ask and err on the side of citing more if you're unsure. **"AI" resources such as ChatGPT are highly discouraged. Any use must be cited, including the prompt you used, and must not be used to generate text you submit as your own writing.**

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

**READINGS ARE TBD – Each week will have one literary/primary text and one secondary academic text.**

**1/14 & 1/17**

**Week 1: Gender & National Origins – The Kojiki**

**1/21 & 1/24**

**Week 2: Gendered Poetics – Nara Period Poetry**

**1/28 & 1/31**

**Week 3: Gendered Writing and National Literature – The Tale of Genji**

**2/4 & 2/7**

**Week 4: Gendered Observations – The Pillow Book**

**2/11 & 2/14: NO CLASS**

**2/18 & 2/21**

**Week 5: Gendered Performance – Noh & Kabuki**

**2/25 & 2/28: NO CLASS**

**3/4 & 3/7**

**Week 6: Edo Period Eroticism: Shunga & Sex Work**

**3/11 & 3/14**

**Week 7: The Modernization/Westernization of Sex**

**3/18 & 3/21**

**Week 8: The Colonial Politics of Gender**

**3/25 & 3/28**

**Week 9: What is Japanese Feminism?**

**4/1 & 4/4**

**Week 10: New Constructions of Gender in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**4/8 & 4/11**

**Week 11: Beautiful Fighting Girls**

**4/15 & 4/18**

**Week 12: Women Writers of the Everyday at the End of the World**