

Media Imaginations of Traditional Japan (and Kyoto)

(Instructor: Stephen Choi)

Course Description

Often, what we think of as tradition is largely determined by how tradition has been depicted in recent years. In this class, we will explore images of Japanese tradition as a kind of adaptation. Focusing on the many aspects of tradition that shape the cultural scape of Kyoto, we will think about how people, places, monuments, arts, and stories traverse time and space to become part of our imagination of the traditional. For example, the early eleventh-century work, *The Tale of Genji*, has been reproduced in countless forms over hundreds of years using different printing and publishing techniques, numerous iterations of the Japanese language, and various visual styles and mediums. It has been translated into many different languages and adapted to film, manga, and animation. Although the work is a thousand years old, the world depicted within it is an active, integral, and thriving part of present-day society. The course will provide students with a deep understanding of how the image of Japan has been developed, changed, and appropriated over time.

During the semester, students will be exposed to diverse forms of media that adapt Kyoto and Japanese tradition for their own purposes within their specific contexts. Through excursions, activities, film viewings, guest lectures and performances, students will gain a first-hand experience of traditional culture as it exists in present-day Japan, blurring the division between the premodern, modern, and contemporary. Students will also create their own media representation of Kyoto as a way of deeply interacting with its landscape and culture. This wide-ranging investigation of Japanese tradition is designed to prepare students for possible future endeavors dealing with Japanese culture, society, and history, by fostering an understanding of the fluidity of images and how they impact and are impacted by their contemporary contexts.

Expected Outcomes

Students are expected to gain basic knowledge of media culture and the history of the production and reception of images in Japan. They are also expected to be able to articulate their awareness of the processes through which our images of tradition change over time, as well as analyze the significance of those changes in an academic manner. Furthermore, exposure to various styles of language as they appear in diverse forms of media will broaden students' awareness of the diversity of the Japanese language.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Attendance (10%): Daily attendance is mandatory. In case of absence, please notify the instructor.

Participation (20%): Students are expected to do the readings and prepare weekly responses in preparation for each class. The responses will be used for in-class discussion. Both the responses and active participation in the in-class discussions will count toward the participation grade.

Field Trip Reports (20%): We will make a number of field trips during the course. Students will write a short report on the experience, what they learned, and how it relates to the topics raised in the class.

Group Project and Presentation (20%): Students will form groups to produce a visual representation of an aspect of Japanese tradition in Kyoto.

Final Paper (30%): Students are expected to choose a specific aspect of Japan's traditional culture and discuss one way that it has been depicted. The essay should reflect their understanding of the role of representation in society.

Schedule for the Semester

Week 1: The Many Faces of Genji

In this introductory week, we will discuss the notion of adaptation and how it applies to place and tradition. Kyoto, as the old and long-time capital of Japan, is a central location for many important aspects of Japanese tradition. We will explore how Japanese tradition has been adapted to different time periods and contexts. A field trip to The Tale of Genji Museum in Uji will allow students to experience one way how ancient Japan is represented in the present day.

Class 1 – Course introduction: adapting place and tradition.

Class 2 – Field trip to The Tale of Genji Museum.

Supplementary Reading:

Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

“Chapter IX: The Vocabulary of Japanese Aesthetics I,” in *Sources of Japanese tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

Week 2: Gendering Heian Japan

The Heian-kyō, a former name of Kyoto used from over a thousand years ago, now exists in cultural imagination as a place of beauty and elegance. It has been reimagined over time through many different adaptations of literary classics set in the Heian period. We will particularly look at changing depictions of gender in recent animated versions of popular classics.

Class 3 – *The Tale of Genji* and its modern adaptations.

Class 4 – Female characters in animated classics: *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* and *The Heike Story*.

Supplementary Reading:

Selections from *Envisioning 'The Tale of Genji': Media, Gender, and Cultural Production*, ed. Haruo Shirane (New York: Columbia UP, 2008).

Laura Moretti, *Recasting the Past: An Early Modern Tales of Ise for Children* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2016)

Week 3: Adapting Monuments

Kyoto is home to some of the most iconic monuments in Japan. The ancient city gate, *Rashōmon*, is well known across the world due to the famous Kurosawa Akira film, even though it does not exist anymore. This week, we will investigate the social and cultural meaning of monuments and their depictions.

Class 5 – *Rashōmon* through the eyes of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Kurosawa Akira.

Class 6 – Mishima Yukio's vandalization of *Kinkakuji* (Golden Pavilion).

Supplementary Reading:

Paul Anderer, *Kurosawa's Rashomon: A Vanished City, A Lost Brother, and the Voice Inside His Iconic Films* (New York, NY: Pegasus Books, 2016).

Week 4: From Poetry Collection to Card Game to a Multi-Media Phenomenon

Hyakunin issu (one hundred Japanese waka by one hundred poets) is a collection of poetry made in the Kamakura period, which is currently well known for its use in the traditional *karuta* card game. In 2008, manga artist Suetsugu Yuki began serializing a manga series based on the card game titled, *Chihayafuru*, which was made into anime and live action film versions enjoyed around the world. It is a great example of how an ancient text can be incorporated into the present day popular culture. In the second part, we will invite competitive *karuta* players based in Kyoto to learn the game.

Class 7 – What is “chihayafuru”? From *makura kotoba* to manga title.

Class 8 – Learn Competitive Karuta with the Ogura Karuta Kai.

Supplementary Reading:

Ewa Machotka, *Visual Genesis of Japanese National Identity: Hokusai's Hyakunin issu* (New York: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009).

Lindsey Stirek, *Manga Afterlives of Ogura hyakunin issu: The Case of Chihayafuru* (Dissertation, 2022)

Week 5: Field Trip to Arashiyama

Arashiyama has been a popular destination from ancient times for its beautiful natural setting. It is also where Fujiwara no Teika selected the poems for the *Hyakunin issu*. We will visit a museum that

exhibits artifacts related to the *Hyakunin issshu* and take a tour of the area where inscriptions of the collection's poems are scattered about.

Class 9/10 – Visit the Saga Arashiyama Museum of Arts and Culture and find the monuments inscribed with *Hyakunin issshu* poems.

Week 6: Modern Theatrical Adaptations of the Past

Theater is a genre that has continuously reimagined, performed, and allowed participation in the world of the past. Izumi Kyōka, for one, actively utilized traditional motifs in his novels and theatrical scripts. We will watch theater and film versions of his *Yasha ga ike* (Demon Pond), as well as a kabuki version of a nineteenth century comic novel *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige* (Shank's Mare) that takes its protagonists' adventures to Las Vegas!

Class 11 – Multiple layers of adaptation surrounding Izumi Kyōka's *Yasha ga ike*.

Class 12 – 2016 Cinema Kabuki rendition of *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige*.

Supplementary Reading:

Mario Talamo, "Tokaidochu hizakurige: popular work, or fruit of a well-planned commercial strategy? An inquiry from a sociological perspective," in *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia* 26 (2013): 7-22.

Week 7: The Horrors of Japanese Tradition

Kyoto is also home to countless stories of monsters and ghosts. The popularity of Japanese horror films is one indication of the strength and depth of horror stories in Japanese culture. This week, we will explore various iterations of *yōkai* (spiritual monsters) and *kaidan* (horror stories) local to Kyoto.

Class 13 – The *yōkai* of Kyoto. (Possible guest lecture by a researcher of *yōkai*)

Class 14 – *Kaidan*: Kyoto's horror stories.

Supplementary Reading:

Monsters, Animals, and Other Worlds: A Collection of Short Medieval Japanese Tales, eds. Keller Kimbrough and Haruo Shirane (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018)

Week 8: Kyoto in Modern Japanese Literature

Many works of modern Japanese literature express and utilize the traditional atmosphere of Kyoto in relation to people's emotions and relationships. We will read sections of works by some of Japan's most famous writers in translation and analyze the role that Kyoto plays in the narrative.

Class 15 – Depictions of Kyoto in Natume Sōseki, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, and Kajii Motojirō.

Class 16 – Kawabata Yasunari's *Koto* (The Old Capital).

Supplementary Reading:

Roy Starrs, "Elegies for a Dying Tradition," in *Soundings in Time: The Fictive Art of Kawabata Yasunari* (Richmond, Surrey: Japan Library, 1998)

Michael F. Marra, "The Space of Poetry: The Kyoto School and Nishitani Keiji," in *Modern*

Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999)

Week 9: Photographing Kyoto and Tradition

Although photography is a modern medium, it has been employed to construct images of Japanese tradition. This week, we will discuss the role of photography in aestheticizing “Japaneseness.” We will visit the Kyoto Museum of Photography Gallery Japanesque and take a photo walk around the city for a hands on experience of framing scenery that emphasize a culture specific aesthetic.

Class 17 – Visit Kyoto Museum of Photography Gallery Japanesque

Class 18 – Photo walk.

Supplementary Reading:

Selections from Terry Bennett, *Photography in Japan, 1853-1912* (Tokyo; Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 2006).

Week 10: The Visual Poetics of Nishijin-ori

Nishijin is Kyoto’s famed weaving district and one of the city’s most traditional areas. This week, we will view a documentary film on Nishijin-ori (Nishijin fabric) and a fictional film set in Nishijin by Takabayashi Yōichi. For the second class, we will watch Ozu Yasujirō film showcasing kimono in daily life. Through these films, we will explore visual representations of Japanese fabric and kimono as well as their role in people’s everyday lives.

Class 19 – Takabayashi Yōichi, *Nishijin shinjū* and Matsumoto Toshio, *Nishijin*.

Class 20 – Ozu Yasujiro, *The End of Summer*.

Supplementary Reading:

Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk, ed. Anna Jackson (London : V&A Publishing, 2020).

Week 11: Make Your Own Visual Image of Kyoto

Producing visual representations of a place is a great way to interact deeply with it. This week, students will form groups and plan a visual project depicting an aspect of Kyoto and its traditional culture. They will have a choice between making a video or a collection of photographs. Students should make ample use of Kyoto’s resources including locations, costumes, and local foods and crafts.

Class 21/Class 22 – Group workshop.

Week 12: The Many Faces of Japanese Warriors

The multimedia franchise of *Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji Swordsman Romantic Story*, as the title indicates, depicts a kind and romantic samurai in Meiji Japan, with a cold and violent past. One of the main plots takes place in Kyoto, where the protagonist fights to prevent the destruction of the Meiji government. It depicts a transitional period in Japan’s history as well as a transformation in the position and characteristic of the samurai warrior. We will discuss various versions of the work and

visit the Samurai & Ninja Museum for a first-hand experience in being a warrior in Japan.

Class 23 – Samurai of the new world in *Rurouni Kenshin*.

Class 24 – Field trip to the Kyoto Samurai & Ninja Museum.

Supplementary Reading:

Maria Grajdian, “Cross-Mediality and the Invincibility of Vulnerability: The Rurouni Kenshin Phenomenon,” *Synergy* 15, Issue 2 (2019)

Week 13: Kyoto in Contemporary Popular Culture

When Kyoto appears in popular media, it is almost always accompanied by images of traditional landmarks like the famous Fushimi Inari Taisha. Some recent games and anime rediscover such locations as fantastic or science fictional spaces. We will discuss the impact of digital media on the imagination of tradition.

Class 25 – Kyoto in games and anime (*Persona 5* [video game]; *Hello, World* [animated film]).

Class 26 – Animated versions of Morimi Tomihiko’s novels set in Kyoto.

Supplementary Reading:

Marc Steinberg, “Condensing the Media Mix: Multiple Possible Worlds in The Tatami Galaxy,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 21, Issue 2 (October 2012).

Week 14: Concluding Week

In this final week, we will review the contents of the course and each group will present their project.

Class 27/28 – Group presentations and overview of the course.