

The Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies (KCJS)

Japanese Performing Arts

(Prof. Luca Domenico Artuso and Prof. Cody Poulton)

Spring 2026

Class times:

Instructor Contact:

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The course is led by Professors Luca Domenico Artuso and Cody Poulton

Course Description

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to the rich tapestry of traditional performing arts of Kyoto. Over the Spring Semester, students will delve into diverse art forms including nōgaku, kyogen, kabuki, and bunraku, as well as various forms of traditional music. Classes incorporate a combination of theoretical study, field trips to cultural landmarks, and hands-on workshops led by experienced masters, offering a unique, immersive experience. Students will explore the historical context, aesthetic principles, and the intricate nuances of these performances. The course aims to not only foster an appreciation for the traditional performing arts in Kyoto but also facilitate a deeper understanding of Japanese culture and its historical trajectory.

Part I (Luca Domenico Artuso)

The first half of the course will focus on nōgaku, a multi-faceted Japanese performing art that merges dance, music, drama, poetry, as well as the craft of masks and costumes. Nō plays portray a world where the boundaries of past, present, and future blur and our consciousness of memory, the moment, and anticipation of what is to come unite. The exceptional experience of such a moment is a primary reason for the appeal of nō. In this singular environment, the spirits of elegant ladies and fierce warriors, gods and goddesses, flowering plants and demons appear and share nostalgic memories of their desires and attachments and seek for solace and redemption. In this class, we will delve into the evolution and artistic

conventions of *nō* and *kyōgen*, the comedic counterpart to *nō*, as a living tradition. Our classroom sessions involve reading and analyzing plays, contextualizing them historically and literarily. We will complement theoretical learning with practical experiences, dedicating field trips to not only observe performances, but also visit the workshops of the skilled artisans who create masks and costumes.

Part II (Cody Poulton)

The second half of the course explores the two representative theatrical genres of the Edo period, *bunraku* (the puppet theatre that developed in Osaka) and *kabuki*. We briefly examine the origins of Japanese musical narrative in *heikyoku* (the musical performance of the *Tales of the Heike*) to establish a framework for the understanding of Japanese narrative in general. This then serves as a parameter for approaching *bunraku*. Classwork includes literary analysis of representative works and performance analysis in which the musical and performance conventions of the theatre are examined. The contemporary themes of *giri* and *ninjō* and their role in the formation of drama are also discussed. The following section on *kabuki* delves into the theme of popular culture and its continual referencing of earlier performance genres, notably *nō*, in the creation of a vibrant theatrical genre, one that fused the latest trends with classical tropes—popular dance accompanied by the *shamisen* and the *nō* ensemble, the reinterpretation of classic works, such as *Dōjōji* or *Ataka (Kanjinchō)*, again from the *nō* theatre. The themes covered in class will then be reinforced through attending actual performances.

Expected outcomes

Students are expected to gain a broad understanding of Japanese performing arts, their historical progression, and their significance in modern society. Beyond classroom-based research and discussions, students will enrich their learning with practical knowledge derived from observing artisans at work and attending performances. This dual approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of both tangible and intangible cultural forms explored in the course, creating a well-rounded appreciation and comprehension of these profound artistic traditions.

Course requirements

Attendance

Daily attendance is mandatory. Outings are activities. In the event of illness or other absence, please notify your instructor, the Resident Director, or the office staff as soon as possible by telephone or via e-mail. Performances often take place during the weekend: students are encouraged to check the syllabus at the beginning of the semester and keep those dates open.

Readings

Students are expected to prepare readings in advance. Readings and other handouts will be provided by the lecturers in advance.

Class attendance

Please refrain using smartphones in class. Any other electronic device should be used solely for note-taking purposes. Failing to comply to this rule may result in a penalty.

Assessment

As part of the two course assignments, students will choose topics for further individual research after the end of Part I and Part II. Presentation formats may include academic papers, translations with commentaries, or creative works based on research.

Part I

attendance: 5%
reflection papers: 2 X 10 = 20%
outline and annotated bibliography: 5%
presentation: 5%
essay: 15%

total: 50%

Part II:

attendance: 5%
reflection papers: 2 X 10 = 20%
outline and annotated bibliography: 5%
presentation: 5%
essay: 15%

total: 50%

Grading: Letter Grades are calculated on the following percentage scale:

A+ 95-100 A 85-94 A- 80-84 B+ 75-79 B 70-74 B- 65-69

C+ 60-64 C 55-59 D 50-54 F less than 50%

Course Policy

As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited. In practical terms, this means that, as students, all work submitted in this course, whether in draft or final form, must be your own. You must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent. Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated.

The use of ChatGPT or any other AI tools for course assignments (with the exception of artificial neural networks like DeepL for machine translations, duly cited) is tantamount to plagiarism. Any cases of plagiarism or cheating will be reported to Columbia Undergraduate Global Engagement and the academic advisor at your home institution and are subject to the code of academic conduct there. In such cases, your final grade will be determined by your home institution and not by KCJS.

If you are a student with a disability and have a Disability Services-certified 'Accommodation Letter' from your home institution, please send me this letter before the first day of class to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation and do not have an accommodations letter, you should contact the Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement at Columbia University (uge@columbia.edu).

Textbooks (copies of selected sections will be provided)

- Karen Brazell. *Traditional Japanese Theater: An Anthology of Plays*. (Columbia UP, 1998)
- Pinnington, Noel. *A New History of Medieval Japanese Theatre*. (Columbia UP, 2019)
- Salz, Jonah (ed.) *A History of Japanese Theatre*. (Cambridge UP, 2016)
- Samuel Leiter (ed.). *A Kabuki Reader: History and Performance*. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002)

Online resources

Nō and kyōgen

- jparc.online/nohgaku_top
- the-noh.com
- noh.stanford.edu
- www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/noh/en/
- kabuki21.com

Other readings

Play translations:

- Bethe, Monica and Richard Emmert. *Noh Performance Guides: Matsukaze, Fujito, Tenko, Atsumori, Aoinoue, Miidera, Ema*. (National Noh Theater)
- Brazell, Karen, ed. *Twelve Plays of the Noh and Kyōgen Theaters*. (Cornell East Asia Series, Ithaca, N.Y. 1988)
- Brandon, James and Samuel Leiter (eds.). *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Brilliance and Bravado, 1697-1766, Vol. 1*. (Hawaii University Press, 2002).
- *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Villainy and Vengeance, 1773-1799, Vol. 2*. Honolulu: (Hawaii University Press, 2002).
 - *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Darkness and Desire, 1804-1864, Vol. 3*. (Hawaii University Press, 2002).
 - *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Restoration and Reform, 1872-1905*, (Hawaii University Press, 2002).
- Keene, Donald. Tr. *Twenty Noh Plays*. (New York. 1955)
- *Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu*. (Columbia paperback, 1961)
- Kenny, Don. *The Kyōgen Book: An Anthology of Japanese Classical Comedies*. The Japan Times. (Tokyo, 1989)
- Shimazaki Chifumi. *The Noh. God Noh, Warrior Noh, Woman Noh I,II,III*. Hinoki Shoten, (Tokyo, Japan. 1973, 76, 77, 80,87).
- *Warrior Ghost Plays from the Japanese Noh Theater*. (Cornell East Asia Series, Cornell East Asia Program 1993)
 - *Restless Spirits from Japanese Noh Plays of the Fourth Group* (Cornell East Asia Series, Cornell East Asia Program, 1995)

Nō history and plays

- Atkins, Paul. *Revealed Identity: The Noh Plays of Komparu Zenchiku*. (Center for Japanese Studies, U. of Michigan, 2006)
- Beng Choo, Lim. *Another Stage: Kanze Nobumitsu and the Late Muromachi Noh Theater*. (Cornell East Asia Series, 2012).
- Bethe and Brazell. *Nō as Performance: An Analysis of the Kuse Scene of Yamamba*. (Ithaca, N.Y. 1978)
- Bethe and Brazell. *Dance in the Nō Theater*. (Ithaca, N.Y. 1982)
- Brandon, James R, ed. *Nō and Kyōgen in the Contemporary World* (University of Hawaii, 1997)
- Keene, Donald. *Nō: The Classical Theater of Japan*. (Tokyo, 1966, 1973)
- Komparu, Kunio. *The Noh Theater: Principles and Perspectives*. (Tokyo, 1983)
- Hoff, Frank and Willi Flindt. *Life Structure of Nō. An English Version of Yokomichi Mario's Analysis of the Structure of Nō*. Reprint from Concerned Theatre Japan, Vol. 2, no. 3,4. (1973)
- Pinnington, Noel. *A New History of Medieval Japanese Theatre*. (Palgrave, 2019).
- Yamanaka Reiko, Monica Bethe, Eike Grossmann, Tom Hare, Diego Pellicchia, and Michael Watson, eds. *A Companion to Noh and Kyōgen Theatre 2 Vols*. Brill, 2025.

Nō treatises and transmission

- Hare, Thomas. *Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo*. (Stanford. 1986)
- Hare, Tomas. *Zeami Performance Notes*. (Columbia University Press, 2008)
- Nearman, Mark. translations of Zeami's *Kyu'i*, *Kyakuraika*, and *Kakyo* in *Monumenta Nipponica* (Autumn 1978, Summer 1980, Autumn, Winter 1982, Spring 1983)
- Michiko Yusa, "Riken no Ken: Seami's Theory of Acting an Theatrical Appreciation" *MN* Vol. 42, no. 3, (Autumn 1987)
- Pinnington, Noel. *Traces in the Way: Michi and the Writings of Komparu Zenchiku*. (Cornell East Asia Series, 2006)
- Rath, Eric. *The Ethos of Noh* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2004)
- Quinn, Shelley Fenno. *Developing Zeami: The Noh Actor's Attunement in Practice*. (University of Hawaii Press, 2005)

Rimer and Yamazaki (tr.) *On the Art of the Nō Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami.*

(Princeton UP, 1984)

Thornhill, Arthur H. *Six Circles, One Dewdrop: The Religio-Aesthetic World of Komparu*

Zenchiku (Princeton UP, 1993)

Kyōgen

Haynes, Carolyn. "Parody in Kyogen: Makura monogurui and Tako" *Monumenta Nipponica*

39 (1984)

Haynes, Carolyn. "Comic Inversion in Kyōgen: Ghosts and the Nether World," *Journal of Association of Teachers of Japanese.* (1988)

Kenny, Don. *The Kyōgen Book. An Anthology of Japanese Classical Comedies.* The Japan Times, Tokyo, 1989

Morley, Carolyn. *Transformation, Miracles, and Mischief; The Mountain Priest Plays of Kyōgen* (Cornell East Asia Series, East Asia Program, 1993)

General Japanese Theater and other Japanese Theatrical Arts

Adachi, Barbara. *Backstage at Bunraku* (Weatherhill, 1985)

Brandon, James. *Kabuki: Five Classic Plays* (Harvard University Press, 1975, University of Hawaii Press, 1992)

Keene, Donald. *Nō and Bunraku: Two Forms of Japanese Theatre.* (Columbia University Press, 1990)

Parker, Helen S. E. *Progressive Traditions: An Illustrated Study of Plot Repetition in Traditional Japanese Theater* (Brill, 2006)

Nō Costumes and Masks

The World of Noh Costumes, Yamaguchi Orimono, Inc. (Kyoto, 1989)

Patterns and Poetry: Nō Robes from the Lucy Truman Aldrich Collection. (Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design, 1992)

Takeda, Sharon Sadako & Monica Bethe. *Miracles and Mischief; Noh and Kyōgen Theater in Japan.* (Los Angeles County Museum, 2002).

Teele, Rebecca, ed. *Nō Kyōgen Masks and Performance.* *Mime Journal* 1984. (Claremont, Ca. 1986.)

The Tokugawa Collection of Noh Costumes and Masks. (Japan Society. New York, 1976.)

Trinh Khanh, ed. *Theater of Dreams, Theater of Play: Nō and Kyōgen in Japan*. (Art Gallery New South Wales, 2014).

Bunraku and Kabuki

Brandon, James, *Kabuki: Five Classic Plays* (Harvard University Press, 1975, pb 1992).

Brandon, James, *Chūshingura: Studies in Kabuki and the Puppet Theater*. (University of Hawaii Press, 1982).

Brandon, James, William Malm, Donald Shively. *Studies in Kabuki: Its Acting, Music and Historical Context*. A Cultural Learning Institute Monograph. (U. of Hawaii East-West Center and U. of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1978).

Brandon, James, tr. With Miwa Tamako. *Kabuki Plays: Kanjinchō and the Zen Substitute*. (New York. Samuel French, 1966).

Brandon, James and Samuel Leiter (eds.). *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Brilliance and Bravado, 1697-1766, Vol. 1*. (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2002).

Brandon, James and Samuel Leiter (eds.). *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Villainy and Vengeance, 1773-1799, Vol. 2*. (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2002).

Brandon, James and Samuel Leiter (eds.). *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Darkness and Desire, 1804-1864, Vol. 3*. (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2002).

Gerstle, Andrew, Kiyoshi Inobe, William Malm, *Theater as Music: The Bunraku Play "Mt. Imo and Mt. Se; An Exemplary Tale of Womanly Virtue"*, (Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan, 1990).

Gerstle, Andrew, *Circles of Fantasy; Convention in the Plays of Chikamatsu*, (Harvard Council on East Asian Studies, 1986).

Halford, Aubrey S. and Giovanna M. Halford. *The Kabuki Handbook. A Guide to Understanding and Appreciation, with Summaries of Favourite Plays, Explanatory Notes, and Illustrations*, (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1990).

Isaka, Maki. *Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016.

Jones, Stanleigh H., tr. *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees* (Columbia UP, 1993).

Keene, Donald, tr. *Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu*. (Columbia Paperback, 1961).

-----, *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*. Columbia University Press, 1961.

Parker, Helen, *Progressive Traditions; An Illustrated Study of Plot Repetition in Traditional Japanese Theatre*. (Brill, 2006).

Background (classics)

Heldt, Gustav (tr.). *The Kojiki: An Account of Ancient Matters* (Columbia UP, 2014)

McCullough, Helen (tr.). *Tales of Ise*. (Tokyo 1968/1978.)

McCullough, Helen (tr.). *Kokin wakashū: the first imperial anthology of Japanese poetry*.
(Stanford UP 1985)

Sato Hiroaki and Burton Watson. *An Anthology of Japanese Poetry From the Country of
Eight Islands*. (Anchor, 1981).

Tyler, Royall (tr.). *The Tales of the Heike*. (Penguin, 2014)

Tyler, Royall. (tr.) *The Tale of Genji*. (Penguin, 2001).

Shirane, Haruo. *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*. (Columbia 2012).

Background (historical and cultural)

Araki, James. *The Ballad-drama of Medieval Japan*. (Berkeley, 1964).

Blacker, Carmen. *The Catalpa Bow. A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*. (The Devonshire Press, 1975)

Goff, Janet. *Noh Drama and The Tale of Genji. The Art of Allusion in Fifteen Classical Plays*. (Princeton Library of Asian Translations. 1991).

Hall, J.W./Takeshi, T. (ed) *Japan in the Muromachi Age*. (Berkeley, 1977.)

Hisamatsu, Sen'ichi. *The Vocabulary of Japanese Literary Aesthetics*. (Tokyo. 1963/1978)

Izutsu, T&T. *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan*. (The Hague. 1981.)

Lafleur, William. *The Karma of Words*. (University of California Press, 1983)

Matisoff, Susan. *The Legend of Semimaru, Blind Musician of Japan*. (N.Y. 1978)