

Translating Japan: Cultural Borrowing, Adaptation, and Exchange

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Tuesdays 2:55-4:25pm & Thursdays 4:40-6:10pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

How does culture travel? What happens when stories, images, rituals, and places are borrowed, translated, or adapted across languages, media, and historical moments? This course examines how Japan has repeatedly negotiated cultural difference by transforming foreign forms into new aesthetic, literary, and social practices—and how the Japanese culture has, in turn, been translated and reimagined by and for others.

Spanning from Japan's premodern engagements with Chinese literature and poetry, as well as Buddhist narratives, to modern encounters with Western literature, film, scanlation and fansubbing of manga and anime, video games, and the ever-growing global tourism, this course approaches translation not as a purely linguistic act, but as a broader cultural process that operates across media, performance, material culture, and even space. Students will have a chance to analyze a wide spectrum of primary texts (in translation) alongside visual art and popular media to trace how authenticity and cultural meaning are produced and negotiated through acts of borrowing and adaptation.

A central component of the course also lies in its sustained engagement with Kyoto as a living site of cultural translation. Through field trips to museums and workshops, students will examine how objects, practices, and media are curated and presented for different audiences. The course subsequently culminates in a two-week unit that applies these analytical tools to the city itself: through guided walking explorations, the students will get a chance to compare highly translated tourist environments such as Gion and Kiyomizu-dera—designed to meet the expectations of a global gaze—with everyday neighborhoods like the Demachiyangi area, where translation operates differently, more implicitly, and often unevenly. This contrast, in turn, will allow us to see how Kyoto is continually re-authored as both a site of cultural production and a lived space.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Explain translation as a cultural practice that extends beyond language into media, ritual, and space.
- Analyze adaptations across literary, visual, and digital media.
- Compare Japan's historical encounters with foreign cultures and their impact on cultural production.
- Evaluate translation and localization strategies and their cultural consequences.
- Interpret Kyoto's heritage and everyday spaces as sites of cultural mediation.
- Synthesize textual and field-based evidence into clear analytical arguments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

1) Attendance and participation (25% of final grade)

As this class is centered on informed, active discussion, it is crucial that students come prepared having read/viewed all the assigned primary and engaged with as many recommended secondary materials as possible. To receive full participation marks, students must attend classes regularly, partake in the fieldtrips, and engage in thoughtful and respectful dialogue with their peers, contributing their insights and questions. In the event of an unavoidable absence, the students are expected to contact the instructor beforehand and, where appropriate, make arrangements to make up any missed work. Unexcused absences, consistent tardiness, lack of preparation, and failure to contribute to class dialogue will adversely affect grades.

2) Fieldtrip reflections (20% of final grade)

As we will undertake and number of fieldtrips starting in Week 3, students will be expected to write a short reflection on their experience, commenting on what they learned and how this circles back to the class themes.

3) Discussion leadership (15% of final grade)

All students will have the opportunity to lead one in-class discussion section. The sign-up schedule will be distributed in Week 2. To prepare, each student should put together a concise handout (1-2 pages) analyzing some aspect of the primary materials for that week, in addition to addressing any relevant issues raised by the secondary readings. The handout should approximately take 5-10 minutes to present and must also include several questions to guide the subsequent discussion.

4) Final presentation (15% of final grade)

Each student will have the opportunity to do one mini-presentation (approximately 5-7 minutes) at the end of the semester where they will introduce their final paper or project to the rest of the class.

5) Final paper, translation or creative project (25% of final grade)—DUE 4/22/2027

For the final project, students will synthesize the course's themes by engaging directly with translation, adaptation, or cultural mediation. Students may choose one of three formats: 1) a formal analytical essay that examines course materials in their historical, cultural, or medial contexts; 2) a short translation project for students who wish to build on their Japanese language proficiency, accompanied by a critical commentary reflecting on translation choices, challenges, and audience; or 3) a creative adaptation that reinterprets a text, image, narrative, or space from the course in a new medium, accompanied by a reflective statement explaining the conceptual and cultural decisions involved. More details with guidelines and expectations for each format will be distributed later in the semester.

COURSE MATERIALS

All class reading materials will be posted on Courseworks, be freely accessible via CLIO or online, and/or distributed in class as photocopies. On occasion, video materials available through major streaming services may be recommended but every effort will be made to accommodate or provide alternative options for students who cannot access them.

COURSE POLICIES

For information detailing general course policies and matters such as academic integrity, AI use, accessibility/disability accommodations, etc. please see page 9 of this syllabus.

COURSE SCHEDULE*

**Weekly materials and assignments may be subject to some changes based on class interests and the instructor's discretion.*

Jan 12 (Tue) Session 1: Course Overview

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Roman Jakobson's "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959)
- Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006)

Jan 14 (Thu) Session 2: Borrowed "China" I—Poetry, Art & Prestige

▶ Primary Sources:

- Selections from *Wakan Rōeishū* (Rimer & Chives trans.)
- Selected poems by Bai Juyi & Du Fu
- Prominent examples of *kara-e*

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Haruo Shirane's (2014) "Mediating the Literary Classics: Commentary and Translation in Premodern Japan"

Jan 19 (Tue) Session 3: Borrowed "China" II—Fantasy of the Foreign

▶ Primary Sources:

- *Taketori monogatari*, beginning + return to the moon episode (Keene trans.)
- *Utsuho monogatari*, selections esp. Toshikage's trip to China & shipwreck in Persia (Uraki trans.)

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- David Pollack's (1986) *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan's Synthesis of China*, "Introduction" + select excerpts

Jan 21 (Thu) Session 4: “Foreign” Before Times Modern—Adaptation as Domestication

► Primary Sources:

- Selected *setsuwa* from the *Konjaku monogatari* (Ury trans.)
- Asai Ryōi’s *Botan Dōrō* (Toman Mori trans.) vs. Qu You’s original “Peony Lantern” story, *Mudan Dengji* (Yang trans.)

In class:

- Clips from “Peony Lantern” Kabuki adaptation
- Selection of visual materials: Buddhist art with continental influence, eg. from Shōsōin repository

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- David Emanuel Pastreich’s “Grappling with Chinese writing as a Material Language” (2001), esp. “Appendix,” which includes translation of the intro to Ogyū Sōrai’s *Yakubunsentei*
- Yukari Fukuichi Meldrum’s “Source-Based Translation and Foreignization” (2009)

Jan 26 (Tue) Session 5: Tea Ceremony as Cultural Translation

► Primary Sources:

- Myōan Eisai’s *Kissa yōjōki* (Varley trans.)
- Selections from Sen no Rikyū’s “Hundred Verses” *Rikyū Hyakushū* (Mittwer trans.)
- Examples of material culture associated with *chanoyu* vs. *senchadō*

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Morgan Pitelka’s (2014) “Warriors, Tea, and Art in Premodern Japan”
- Okakura Kakuzō’s *The Book of Tea* (1906)

Jan 28 (Thu) Session 6: Field trip to the Raku Museum + workshop*

*if unavailable, visit to the Museum of Furita Oribe

Feb 2 (Tue) Session 7: *Rangaku* & Translating the West Before Meiji

► Primary Sources:

- Hiraga Gennai’s *Fūryū Shidōken-den*, excerpts (Drake trans.)
- Calvin French’s *Shiba Kōkan: Artist, Innovator, and Pioneer in the Westernization of Japan*, excerpted background and translations of Kōkan’s misc. writings
- A selection of *Rangaku*-influenced visual materials, from prints to encyclopedias

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Timon Screech’s *The Lens Within the Heart: The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Period* (2002), excerpts.
- Arano Yasunori’s “Foreign Relations in Early Modern Japan: Exploding the Myth of National Seclusion” (2013).

Feb 4 (Thu) Session 8: Meiji Encounters I—Translating Civilization & Identity

► Primary Sources:

- Kanagaki Robun's "The Beefeater" *Ushiya zōdan: Aguranabe* (Keene trans.)
- Fukuzawa Yukichi's "Goodbye Asia" *Datsu-A Ron* (Sharpe trans.)
- Natsume Sōseki's "My Individualism" *Watakushi no Kojinshugi* (Rubin trans.)

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Karatani Kojin's "The Discursive Space of Modern Japan" (Lippit trans., 1991)
- Eiko Ikegami's "Citizenship and National Identity in Early Meiji" (2009)

Feb 9 (Tue) Session 9: Meiji Encounters II—Translating Landscape & Language

► Primary Sources:

- Portions of Futabatei Shimei's *Aibiki* (Komova trans.) vs. Turgenev's original "The Tryst" (Garnett trans.)
- Portions of Kunikida Doppo's "Musashino" and "Those Unforgettable People" *Wasureenu hitobito* (David Chibbett trans.)
- Tsubouchi Shōyō's "The Essence of the Novel" *Shōsetsu Shinzui* (Caddeau trans.)

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Massimiliano Tomasi, "Quest for a New Written Language: Western Rhetoric and the Genbun Itchi Movement" (1999)
- Karatani Kojin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (1993), Chapter 1 "The Discovery of Landscape" and Chapter 2 "The Discovery of Interiority"

Feb 11 (Thu) National Holiday—NO CLASS

Feb 16 (Tue) Session 10: Japonism—Translating "Japan"

► Primary Sources:

- Lacadio Hearn's *Kwaidan*, selections
- Excerpts from Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*, viewed together with clips from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* in class
- Selection of visual materials by Monet, Van Gogh, Whistler, etc.

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- John De Gruchy's *Orienting Arthur Waley: Japonism, Orientalism, and the Creation of the Japanese Literature in English*, Chapter One "The Institutionalization of Japonism in Britain: From Aestheticism toward Modernism"
- Larry Walker's "Early Translations of the Japanese Novel in English: Practices, Trends and Reception"

Feb 18 (Thu) Session 11: Fieldtrip to the Nishijin Textile Center + workshop

Feb 23 (Tue) National Holiday—NO CLASS

Feb 25 (Thu) Session 12: Translating and Adapting Across Media I

► Primary Sources:

- Robert Aitken's "Matsuo Bashō: Frog Haiku—Thirty-two Translations and One Commentary"
- Selections from *Noh or Accomplishment* (1912) (Ezra Pound, Ernest Fenollosa [trans] & William Butler Yeats [intro])
- In-class viewing of video "Blue Moon Over Memphis" (Elvis Presley Noh in English)

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Cana Maeda's "On Translating the Haiku Form"
- Ovidiu Matiu's "Translating Poetry: Contemporary Theories and Hypotheses" (2008)
- Richcard Emmert's "Background to Creating Blue Moon Over Memphis—The 'Elvis' Noh" (2016)

March 1st-5th SPRING BREAK—NO CLASSES

Mar 9 (Tue) Session 13: Translating and Adapting Across Media II

► Primary Sources:

- Viewing of clips from Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957)
- Viewing of clips from Yukio Ninagawa's "Kabuki Macbeth" (1980)
 - Cf. The Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Macbeth* (1978)

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Cana Erin Suzuki's "Lost in Translation: Reconsidering Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*"
- Linda Hutcheon's (2006) "Beginning to Theorize Adaptation: What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?"

Mar 11 (Thu) Session 14: Murakami Haruki & Writing for Translation

► Primary Sources:

- Alfred Birnbaum's translation of the opening of *Norwegian Wood* (1989) vs. Jay Rubin's translation of the opening of *Norwegian Wood* (2000)

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Cana Anna Zielinska-Elliott's (2015) "Murakami International: The Translation of a Literary Phenomenon"
- Mette Holm's (2015) "Translating Murakami Haruki as a Multilingual Experience"

- Ana Fernández Guerra's (2012) "Translating culture: problems, strategies and practical realities"

Mar 16 (Tue) Session 15: Scanlation, Fansubbing & the Unofficial Worlds of Translation

► Primary Sources:

- Comparison of a few first sections from Isayama Hajime's manga *Attack on Titan* (2009–2021) as scanlated by a fan group vs. an official translation by Kodansha USA
 - A videoclip from *Attack on Titan* anime (first episode), first in Japanese with fan-generated English subtitles and then in official English dubbing (2013–2023)
- Comparison of a few first sections from Gotouge Koyoharu's manga *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* (2016–2020) as scanlated by a fan group vs. an official translation by Viz Media
 - A videoclip from *Demon Slayer* anime (first episode), first in Japanese with fan-generated English subtitles and then in official English dubbing (2019–2024)

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- James Rampant's (2010) "The Manga Polysystem: What Fans Want, Fans Get—A Look at Translation Strategies of Foreignization Adopted by Manga Translation Publishers"
- Minako O'Hagan's (2009) "Evolution of User-generated Translation: Fansubs, Translation Hacking and Crowdsourcing"
- Jordan S. Hatcher's (2005) "Of Otakus and Fansubs: A Critical Look at Anime Online in Light of Current Issues in Copyright Law"

Mar 18 (Thu) Session 16: Fieldtrip to the Kyoto International Manga Museum + workshop

Mar 23 (Tue) Session 17: Cultural Translation I—Localizing Video Games

► Primary Sources:

- Side-by-side examples of video game localization from multiple angles:
 - Tone & voice (eg. *Final Fantasy*, *Persona*)
 - Cultural content & censorship (eg. *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, *Tokyo Mirage #FE*)
 - Mechanics & gameplay (eg. *Dark Souls*, *Monster Hunter*)
 - Aesthetics (eg. *The Legend of Zelda*, *Ōkami*)

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Minako O'Hagan's (2012) "Transcreating Japanese Video Games: Exploring the Future Direction for Translation Studies in Japan"

- Olga Ryzhkina, Anastasiya Golendukhina and Snezana Stupar-Ruterfrans' (2018) "Cultural Aspects of Video Game Software Adaptation"
- Brian Ashcraft's (2010) "The Surprising Ways Japanese Games Are Changed For Westerners"

Mar 25 (Thu) Session 18: Cultural Translation II—Localizing Film

► Primary Sources:

- Comparison of *Godzilla* (1954) vs. *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1956)
- Comparison of *Ringu* (1998) vs. *The Ring* (2002)

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Chon Noriega's (1987) "Godzilla and the Japanese Nightmare: When 'Them!' is U.S."
- Smile Virtuoso's (2025) "Film Analysis: Ringu vs. The Ring—A Cross-Cultural Horror Comparison"

Mar 30 (Tue) Session 19: Translating Kyoto: Space, Heritage, Tourism I

► Primary Sources:

- A playthrough of Ubisoft's *Assassin Creed Shadows* (2025) [students who are unable to play the game directly can watch a walkthrough on Youtube]
- Watch portions of Mizoguchi Kenji's *Sisters of the Gion* (1936)
- Clips from various tourist ads about Kyoto

Apr 1 (Thu) Session 20: Fieldtrip—Walking tour of Gion and Kiyomizu-dera

Apr 6 (Tue) Session 21: Translating Kyoto: Space, Heritage, Tourism II

► Primary Sources:

- Kawabata Yasunari's *The Old Capital* (1968, Holman trans.), portions
- Kashiwai Hisashi's *The Kamogawa Food Detectives* (2023, Kirkwood trans.), portions

▷ Recommended Secondary Sources:

- Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City" (1984, Rendall trans.), excerpts
- John Urry's "The Tourist Gaze" (1990), excerpts

Apr 8 (Thu) Session 22: Fieldtrip— We will take a leisurely walk in the Demachiyanagi area through the Demachi Masugata Shopping Street, Kyoto University Co-op Bookstore, and the Shimogamo Shrine

Apr 13 (Tue) Session 23: Student Final Presentations I

Apr 15 (Thu) Session 24: Student Final Presentations II

COURSE POLICIES

ABSENCES AND LATE WORK

Due to the participation and discussion-based nature of this course, regular attendance is mandatory—including on fieldtrips. In the event of unavoidable absences, including illness, students are strongly encouraged to email the instructor in advance. Unexplained and unexcused absences will negatively impact one's grade. Late assignments will be deducted a penalty of one grade per day (A becomes A- if one day late, B+ if two days late, etc.) unless there are advance arrangements made with the instructor, the Office of Disability Services, or other proper administrative channels.

ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

Any students that may have a condition or disability that can adversely affect their ability to complete their coursework on time, prevent them from engaging in certain classroom activities and fieldtrips, or otherwise require special accommodations are encouraged to seek assistance through the Office of Disability Services or comparable entity at their home institution—both for the sake of a formal notification and to ensure that proper arrangements can be made in a timely manner. Anyone who has a certified “Accommodation Letter” is kindly asked to get in touch with the instructor at their earliest convenience, ideally before the first day of class, to confirm their accommodation needs.

If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation and do not have a certified accommodations letter, please contact the Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement at Columbia University (uge@columbia.edu) to discuss your options.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty in any shape or form will not be tolerated. Students are expected to submit their own original work, and only their own original work, for any and all assignments to be completed for the class. Violating academic integrity, or helping others violate academic integrity, will result in the student being reported to the Columbia Undergraduate Global Engagement and the academic advisor at your home institution and are subject to the code of academic conduct there. It will also result in a failing (F) grade for the course. For any concerns regarding proper use and citations of materials, please consult with the instructor as ignorance of rules of attribution and citation is not considered a legitimate mitigating factor.

USE OF GENERATIVE AI

Absent a clear statement from a course instructor granting permission, the use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to complete assignments is strictly prohibited. The unauthorized use of AI shall be treated similarly to unauthorized assistance and/or plagiarism page 11 of Standards and Discipline at <https://universitypolicies.columbia.edu/content/standards-and-discipline>.

What's more, when using Generative AI tools for teaching and learning, research, and work-related functions, KCJS expects all KCJS community members to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Do not input confidential information;
- Do not input personal information;
- Do not input information that violates IP or general contract terms and conditions;
- Confirm the accuracy of the output provided by Generative AI tools;
- Check the output of Generative AI tools for bias;
- Disclose the use of Generative AI tools;
- Comply with third-party intellectual property rights.
- For more detailed information, please refer to the following page:

<https://provost.columbia.edu/content/office-senior-vice-provost/ai-policy>

Any cases of plagiarism or cheating will be reported to Columbia Undergraduate Global Engagement and the academic advisor at the student's home institution and will be subject to the code of academic conduct there. In such cases, the student's final grade will be determined by their home institution and not by KCJS.

CONTENT WARNINGS

Although the present course does not inherently contain a great deal of sensitive materials, the instructor will make every effort to warn for potentially triggering content including but not limited to violence, abuse, self-harm, identity-based prejudice, etc. These warnings are given so that all students may be able to participate fully in the course, and anyone with specific concerns is encouraged to raise them at any point.

MANDATORY REPORTING

All KCJS employees in supervisory roles have a Duty to Report all instances or allegations of prohibited conduct including but not limited to discrimination, harassment, retaliation, gender-based misconduct, and sexual violence that involves any undergraduate or graduate students. Faculty and staff must report all allegations of the above-listed crimes to the appropriate administrative offices that will then reach out to the student in question and offer options for how to proceed (students are not required to respond to this outreach). For those students who may 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.