



MSc and MPhil in Japanese Studies 2021/2022

Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Japanese Pop Culture, 1750-2020

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Course Description:

We will meet weekly for a two-hour class, comprised of a lecture, a short student presentation, and class discussion in Hilary Term.

Overview:

This course explores the popular culture of Japan from the mid-eighteenth century to the recent present, with a specific focus on the roles of gender and sexuality in the shaping and definition of power and personhood. We will ask questions about who holds power in historical and contemporary Japanese society, and how power can be created and challenged using popular culture. We will explore how various individuals, groups, and structures employ gender and sexuality in the reinforcement or destruction of social hierarchies and stereotypes. What makes someone a “good woman” or a “good man” in different periods of Japanese history, and why? How are gay, queer, and transgender people represented in modern-day Japanese culture, and how is this similar to or different from historical Japanese attitudes towards non-binary sexuality? What makes a particular creative work “high” or “low” culture? Using representative examples from film and written media, when is difference celebrated in Japan and when is it condemned, and by whom? What is power and what is culture?

Throughout this course, we will analyze a variety of historical and contemporary texts, artworks, films, anime, and other modern media in translation to discuss how definitions and constructions of gender, sexuality, power, and personhood have influenced and continue to influence Japanese history and culture. We will also examine the unexpected encounters, discourses, and intersections of transnational actors and popular culture, from how traveling samurai inspired highly divisive discourse surrounding romance and race in the antebellum United States, to the present-day, cultural consumption of anime and the transnational fan practices of formerly marginalized otaku culture around the globe. We will also explore the role of Japanese popular culture in foreign and gendered perceptions of Japan, as well as the transnational activity and influence of Japanese popular culture and Japanese people.

Topics Covered: (subject to revision)

- the transnational activity and influence of Japanese people and popular culture around the world
- eighteenth-century gendered instructional texts
- nineteenth-century romantic novellas (*ninjōbon*, “books of sentiment”)
- kabuki theatre and Takarazuka (all-female revue theatre)

- woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*)
- popular representations of war and cultural change
- constructions of gender identity and their historical influences
- “girls’ culture” and feminist magazines
- Japanese street theatre and storytelling using illustrated boards (*kamishibai*)
- Japanese film
- *bushidō* (“the way of the samurai”) and constructions of Japanese masculinity
- post-war Japanese music
- anime and manga
- otaku and idol culture
- LGBTIQ+ representation in historical and modern-day Japanese popular culture

Aims of the Course:

- Acquire a broad understanding of the cultural legacy and historical interconnection of three hundred years of Japanese visual and literary culture
- Critically examine popular cultural productions for the politics behind their production, and how popular culture can challenge or reinforce particular structures of power and classifications of people
- Analyze how conceptions and representations of gender, sexuality, power, and personhood have influenced and continue to influence Japanese history and culture
- Explore the transnational and global influence of Japanese people and Japanese popular culture around the world

Format:

We will meet weekly for a two-hour class, comprised of a lecture, a short student presentation, and class discussion. Film screenings will be held each week at the Nissan Lecture Theatre throughout Hilary Term. Reserve copies of films will also be available at the Bodleian Japanese Library.

Course Assessment:

The main assessment will be through a three-hour examination in Trinity Term.

All students will be required to submit a critical short-response paper (1000-2000 words) for assessment by the end of week 4 of the term in which the classes are taught and do one in-class presentation. Details will be given during the first class of the term.

Recommended Introductory Readings:

Atkins, E. Taylor. *A History of Popular Culture in Japan: From the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, 4–32. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

Dale, S. P. F. “Transgender, Non-Binary Genders, and Intersex in Japan.” Chapter 6 in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, edited by Jennifer Coates, Lucy Fraser, and Mark Pendleton, 60–8. New York, NY: Routledge, 2020.

Doan, Natalia. "Samurai and Southern Belles: Interracial Romance, Southern Morality, and the 1860 Japanese Embassy." *Journal of Social History* (2020): 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shaa049>.

Jones, Sumie. "Introduction." In *An Edo Anthology: Literature from Japan's Mega-City, 1750-1850*, edited by Sumie Jones, with Kenji Watanabe, 1–38. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013.

Scott, Joan W. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75.

Statement of Coverage

This document applies to students starting the MSc and/or MPhil in Japanese Studies in Michaelmas Term 2021. The information in this handbook may be different for students starting in other years.

Disclaimer

The information in this document is accurate as at 07 September 2021, however it may be necessary for changes to be made in certain circumstances, as explained at www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges. If such changes are made the department will publish a new version of this handbook together with a list of the changes and students will be informed.