Modern Japanese Literature and Visual Culture: constructions of religious and historical identity

Ronald S. Green
Coastal Carolina University, rgreen@coastal.edu
This course is a survey of modern Japanese literature and visual culture since the Meiji Restoration (1868). It focuses on constructions of identities within historical contexts. In it we analyze ways in which writers and artists have positioned their subjects and re-imagined culture to create particular portrayals. The class examines a selection of *shôsetsu* (the Japanese novel) of Natsume Soseki, Kawabata Yasunari, Mishima Yukio, and Murakami Haruki, films of Kurosawa Akira, Miyazaki Hayao, and Miike Takashi, and important anime.

The course promotes critical methodologies and interdisciplinary or comparative studies, combining, for example, literature with film, visual culture, gender studies, cultural history, Buddhist studies, and so forth. Students are encouraged to work closely with the instructor and simultaneously with professors in other programs and fields to create term papers and presentations for the term project in the class. These should be of a quality presentable at a professional conference or publishable in an academic journal. Professors working in digital humanities should be particularly valuable resources.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course, students will have:

1. Demonstrated knowledge of the philosophical, religious, literary, ethical, cultural and other humanistic concepts through which educated people interpret and judge themselves and their world
2. Demonstrated the ability to recognize varieties of humanistic thought and expression
3. Demonstrated the ability to interpret varieties of humanistic thought and expression
4. Demonstrated the ability to evaluate varieties of humanistic thought and expression
5. Demonstrated the ability to identify important works and writers of modern Japanese literature
6. Demonstrated the ability to discuss Japanese popular culture and globalization

**Required texts**


**Required films**


**Required anime, etc.**

- *Rurouni Kenshin*
- *Aoi Bungaku*
- *Spirited Away*
- *Astro Boy* (episode 1)
- *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie*
- *Serial Experiments Lain*

(and more chosen by the class)
Grading

1. There will be **two tests**. Each test is worth 30% of your final grade for the term. On the two quizzes, you will be asked to provide short-essay answers to ten questions. Some questions will be on the readings, others on the lectures.

2. Completion of the **term project** is worth 30% of the grade for the term. This term project should be a ten-page academic paper or the equivalent using another media approved by the instructor. Class presentations are encouraged. For those writing papers, it must be at least ten pages in length to be accepted for a grade, double-spaced in 12-point type, in a font such as Times New Roman or Courier New. [You may work in teams of two!] Chicago or MLA styles are acceptable. You must use and fully cite at least two reputable academic sources. Web sources are not acceptable unless you can show they are academically sound, such as online peer-reviewed academic journal. That is to say, you may use any web source that furthers your paper, but you must also use at least two academic sources. If you prefer web research, consider using jstor, available through the library.

3. There will be an oral **final exam**. It will cover the content of the anime movie *Metropolis*. Students must attend the screening of *Metropolis* during the scheduled exam time and afterward, successfully discuss its content in the context of constructions of religious and historical identity in Japan since the Meiji Period. The final exam is worth 10% of the grade for the term.

   We will spend several classes throughout the semester discussing, arranging, and working on this project together. Details will be made clear in class.

   Summary of grading:  
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test 1</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Test 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Project</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Based on this, students will earn a letter grade for the term according to the following system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>91 - 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88 - 90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>81 - 87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78 - 80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>71 - 77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68 – 70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>61 - 67%</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 60%</td>
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</tbody>
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**Attendance policy**

Following the guidelines posted in the *CCU Student Handbook*, students who have absences for **25%** of the regularly scheduled class meetings will receive a final grade of “**F**” for the term.
Class Schedule

Week 1
Monday – Introduction to the topic, what to expect from the course, and what is expected of you
Wednesday – Historical background: Meiji Restoration
Friday – Rurouni Kenshin: Trust & Betrayal (aka: Samurai X: Trust & Betrayal, first half)
    Reading for next two weeks: Kokoro by Natsume Soseki

Week 2
Monday – Life and Legacy of Natsume Soseki.
Wednesday – Writings of Natsume Soseki
Friday – Rurouni Kenshin (concluded)

Week 3
Monday – Discussion of Kokoro
Wednesday – Literary development of the Taishō and Shōwa periods
Friday – Aoi Bungaku
    Reading for next two weeks: Thousand Cranes

Week 4
Monday – Life and Legacy of Kawabata Yasunari
Wednesday – Writings of Kawabata
Friday – Kurosawa Akira. Dreams (partial)

Week 5
Monday – Discussion of Thousand Cranes
Wednesday – Neo-impressionism and Kawabata
Friday – Miyazaki Hayao. Spirited Away (first half)

Week 6
Monday – TEST 1, Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa Bunkaku
Wednesday – Historical developments, war, art, and literature in Japan
Friday – Spirited Away (concluded)
    Reading for next two weeks: The Temple of the Golden Pavilion,

Week 7
Monday – Mishima Yukio
Wednesday – The Temple of the Golden Pavilion
Friday – Life of Mishima Yukio (film)

Week 8
Monday – Discussion of The Temple of the Golden Pavilion
Wednesday – Cyborg motif in construction of identity – Metropolis
Friday – Astro Boy (Tetsuwan Atamu), episode 1
    Reading for next two weeks: Hard-Boiled Wonderland

Week 9
Monday – Historical developments including AUM and Space Battleship Yamato
Wednesday – Murakami Haruki
Friday – Gozu
**Week 10**  
Monday – Discussion of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*  
Wednesday – Watanabe Shinichirō and globalization  
Friday – *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie*  
    Reading for next week: Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization, Intro & Chapter 1

**Week 11**  
Monday – **TEST 2**  
Wednesday – Discussion: Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization, Intro & Chapter 1  
Friday – *Serial Experiments Lain* (beginning)  
    Reading for next week: Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization, Chapters 2 & 3

**Week 12**  
Monday – Discussion: Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization, Chapters 2 & 3  
Wednesday – Discussion of *Serial Experiments Lain*  
Friday – *Serial Experiments Lain* (concluded)  
    Reading for next week: Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization, Chapters 4 & 5

**Week 13**  
Monday – Discussion: Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization, Chapters 4 & 5;  
Wednesday – Student presentations  
Friday – *Fullmetal Alchemist* or other anime/game of choice

**Week 14**  
Monday – Student presentations  
Wednesday – Student presentations  
Friday – *Inuyasha* or other anime/game of choice

**Week 15**  
Monday – Student presentations  
Wednesday – Student presentations  
Friday – *Bleach* or other anime/game of choice

**FINAL EXAM:** *Metropolis*