



Animals and Nature in Japanese Culture

EALC 3253 – Spring 2025

Tuesday and Thursday, 3:30 - 5:00PM
3600 Market Street Building, Room 110

Japan is known for its beautiful scenery, and many people associate the country with the cherry blossoms that adorn promotional brochures and the cute animals that populate the internet. Beyond the realm of glossy images, what are the historical attitudes and beliefs expressed by Japanese culture toward animals and nature? How do the people who live in Japan coexist with an environment that is so frequently responsible for devastating natural disasters?

This course serves as an introduction to ecocriticism through the lens of Japanese culture from the late medieval period to the present day. We will approach themes relating to the study of the natural world from a multidisciplinary perspective, and the course will address topics concerning Japanese history, religion, folklore, and contemporary media.

Students will learn to identify and analyze ecological themes in current events, social issues, and texts drawn from mass media and popular culture, including anime and manga. By the end of the semester, students will possess a nuanced and balanced understanding of contemporary Japan, as well as a greater appreciation for cultural specificity and the global connections that guide ideas and practices relating to humanity's relationship with the natural world, as well as our roles and responsibilities in shaping the environment.

Instructor Information

Kathryn Hemmann
khemmann@gmail.com
Office hours by appointment

Required Course Texts

Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure, by Hideo Furukawa
Pluto: Tezuka x Urasawa Vol. 1, by Naoki Urasawa
Tropic of the Sea, by Satoshi Kon
Girl from the Other Side, by Nagabe

Grading and Assignments

Participation: 15%
Five Quizzes: 25%
Four Short Responses: 20%
Research Proposal: 10%
Research Article: 15%
Research Presentation: 15%

Quizzes will be administered on Canvas. They will consist of five simple questions and are intended to keep you on track with the reading assignments.

Short responses (of around 400 words) are opportunities to share your thoughts via open-ended prompts based on our class discussions. You will submit these assignments on Canvas.

The **research presentation** will give you an opportunity to share your original research based on the themes of the class. Your presentation should be around five minutes long (about five slides).

In the **research article**, you will present your original research in the form of a short, illustrated article (of roughly 500 to 750 words) for a general readership.

Handouts with additional details will be provided. You can make up an in-class quiz or your final presentation **only if you submit written documentation** for an excusable absence.

Assignment Due Dates

Quizzes: January 30 + February 13 + February 27 + March 27 + April 17
Short Responses: February 6 + February 20 + March 20 + April 10
Research Proposal: Thursday, March 6
Research Article: Thursday, April 3

Course Policies

Required Readings

Students must purchase the four books required for this class, but all of the articles and short stories will be available on the course site on Canvas. Students are required to complete all assigned readings before class. Please note that the novels will take time to read.

Attendance

Each student is allowed **two unexcused absences**, no questions asked and no excuses necessary. If you would like to excuse an absence, you must submit at least one form of written proof of legitimacy (photocopies and email attachments are fine). Please note that absence notices generated by Canvas do not count as proof of legitimacy. **Each unexcused absence after the second will result in half a letter grade being deducted from your final course grade.** Please be aware that obligations for other classes (such as exams or labs) do not count as a valid excuse.

Disability Accommodation

I'm happy to grant deadline extensions and accommodations to anyone who asks regardless of an official declaration of disability. Please feel free to request whatever you need. Still, please be sure to **send a request in writing** via email so that I have a means of following up with you.

Plagiarism and ChatGPT

I have a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism, which includes machine-generated text. If you submit work that isn't your own for any assignment for any reason, you will receive a score of zero points. If I suspect that you use ChatGPT or any other LLM text generator, you will receive a score of zero for the entire assignment. You are being graded primarily on your good faith effort and engagement with the course material, so there should be no need for you to submit work that you did not create yourself.

Respect

Each student is expected to be respectful of the instructor and their peers. No speech or behavior demonstrating or encouraging discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, age, body shape, or disability will be tolerated. Cultural essentialism, or the reduction of a large and diverse group of people into a set of stereotypes, is open to discussion, but its uncritical reproduction is counter to the purpose of this course.

Content Warnings

As many of the assigned readings cover sensitive issues, students should be aware that we will encounter imagery intended for a mature audience. I will try to warn for content in advance, but students should note that they will be responsible for alerting me to any special accommodations.

Week One: Course Introduction

Thursday, January 16

Course Introduction, Themes, and Learning Goals

In-class viewing of excerpts from *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), directed by Hayao Miyazaki

Week Two: Theoretical Ecocriticism

Tuesday, January 21

Vandana Shiva, "Reductionism and Regeneration: A Crisis in Science," from *Ecofeminism*

Stefano Mancuso, "Article 1: The Earth Shall Be the Common Home of Life," from *The Nation of Plants: A Radical Manifesto for Humans*

Thursday, January 23

David Wallace-Wells, "Storytelling," from *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*

Kōhei Saitō, "Climate Change and the Imperial Mode of Living," from *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto*

Week Three: Nature and Culture

Tuesday, January 28

Philip C. Brown, "Constructing Nature," from *Japan at Nature's Edge*

Thursday, January 30

Brigitte Steger, "Solidarity and Distinction through Practices of Cleanliness in Tsunami

Evacuation Shelters in Yamada, Iwate Prefecture," from *Japan Copes with Calamity*

+ Quiz #1

Week Four: Humans and Animals

Tuesday, February 4

Brett L. Walker, "Wolf Extinction Theories and the Birth of Japan's Discipline of Ecology," from *The Lost Wolves of Japan*

Thursday, February 6

Jakobina Arch, "From Meat to Machine Oil: The Nineteenth-Century Development of Whaling in Wakayama," from *Japan at Nature's Edge*

+ Short Response #1

Week Five: Nature in Urban Spaces

Tuesday, February 11

Noritaka Yagasaki and Yasuko Nakamura, "The Role of Local Groups in the Protection of Urban Farming and Farmland in Tokyo," from *Local Environmental Movements*

Thursday, February 13

Christine Marran, "Animal Histories: Stranger in a Tokyo Canal," from *Japan at Nature's Edge*

+ Quiz #2

Week Six: Animism and Humanism

Tuesday, February 18

Ian Reader, "Unifying Traditions, Cosmological Perspectives, and the Vitalistic Universe," from *Religion in Contemporary Japan*

Thursday, February 20

Barbara R. Ambros, "Vengeful Spirits or Loving Spiritual Companions?: Changing Views of Pet Spirits," from *Bones of Contention*

+ Short Response #2

Week Seven: Human Animals

Tuesday, February 25

Helen Hardacre, "The Practice of *Mizuko Kuyō* and the Changing Nature of Abortion," from *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan*, pp.55-100

Thursday, February 27

Margaret Lock, "Hybrid Selves and the Calculation of Death in Japan and North America," from *Beyond Joseph Needham: Science, Technology, and Medicine in East and Southeast Asia*

+ Quiz #3

Week Eight: Animals in Folklore

Tuesday, March 4

Haruo Shirane and Burton Watson, selections from *The Demon at Agi Bridge*

Thursday, March 6

Michael Dylan Foster, "Natural History of the Weird: Encyclopedias, Spooky Stories, and the Bestiaries of Toriyama Sekien," from *Pandemonium and Parade*

+ Research Proposal

Spring Break

Tuesday, March 11

Thursday, March 13

Week Nine: Nostalgia Trips

Tuesday, March 18

Alex Kerr, "Environment: Cedar Plantations and Orange Ooze," from *Dogs and Demons*

Thursday, March 20

Satoshi Kon, *Tropic of the Sea*

+ Short Response #3

Week Ten: Does the Dog Die?

Tuesday, March 25

Tyran Grillo, "Back to Life," from *Fuzzy Traumas: Animals and Errors in Contemporary Japanese Literature*

Thursday, March 27

Hideo Furukawa, *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure*
+ Quiz #4

Week Eleven: Speculative Posthumanism

Tuesday, April 1

Sayuri Ueda, "Fin and Claw," from *Speculative Japan 3*

Thursday, April 3

Naoki Urasawa, *Pluto: Tezuka x Urasawa Vol. 1*
+ Research Article

Week Twelve: Walking with Animals

Tuesday, April 8

Melek Ortabasi, "Fictional Fantasy or Historical Fact? The Search for Japanese Identity in Miyazaki Hayao's *Mononokehime*," from *A Century of Popular Culture in Japan*
In-class viewing of excerpts from *Princess Mononoke* (1997), directed by Hayao Miyazaki

Thursday, April 10

Hiromi Kawakami, "God Bless You, 2011," from *March Was Made of Yarn*
+ Short Response #4

Week Thirteen: Longing for the Nonhuman

Tuesday, April 15

Joseph Laycock, "'We Are Spirits of Another Sort': Ontological Rebellion and Religious Dimension of the Otherkin Community," from *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*

Thursday, April 17

Nagabe, *Girl from the Other Side*
+ Quiz #5

Week Fourteen: Student Presentations

Tuesday, April 22

Thursday, April 24