

# Contemporary Japanese Fiction and Film

EALC 1351/CIMS 1351/COML 1351/GSWS 1351

Fulfills Arts & Letters Sector

Fulfills Cross Cultural Analysis Requirement

Spring 2024

## Class

Monday and Wednesday 12:00-1:30pm

## Instructors

Caitlin Adkins, ABD

Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30pm-4pm and by appointment (either on Zoom or in my office)

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## Course Description

This course will explore fiction and film in contemporary Japan, from 1945 to the present. Topics will include literary and cinematic representation of Japan's war experience and post-war reconstruction, negotiation with traditional Japanese aesthetics, artistic confrontation with state and society, and changing ideas of gender and sexuality.

We will explore these and other questions by analyzing texts of various genres, including film and film scripts, novels, short stories, and academic essays. Class sessions will combine lectures, discussion, audio-visual materials, and creative as well as analytical writing exercises.

The course is taught in English, although Japanese materials are sometimes available on Canvas as optional readings. No prior coursework in Japanese literature, culture, or film is required or expected.

## Course Objectives

- 1) Learn how to read and analyze fiction and film in increasingly informed and sophisticated ways.

- 2) Learn aspects of postwar Japanese history and culture that are relevant for understanding fiction and film of 1945 to today.
- 3) Learn analytical and creative ways to express ideas and themes that intersect with those in postwar Japanese fiction and film.
- 4) Consider the issue of cinematic adaptation from various angles.

### **Class Structure**

Class attendance and participation will be required of all students.

Required asynchronous activities include weekly readings, film viewings, and Canvas discussion-board posts. **Please keep an eye out for announcements sent via Canvas throughout the semester.**

A time-budget for a typical week will include the following:

- Do the readings (6-8 hours) starting Thursday, best completed by Sunday night.
- Synchronous discussion (1.5 hours) on Monday.
- Film viewings (2-2.5 hours) best completed by Tuesday night.
- Canvas discussion-board posting (1 hour) must be submitted by Monday at 9 am.
- Synchronous discussion (1.5 hours) on Wednesday.
- Canvas response to classmates posting (0.5 hour) ideally by Wednesday class-time.

Note that the readings and viewing assignments make this course quite heavy in terms of workload. (At least 9-10 hours of work outside class).

### **Texts**

**All required texts will be made available on Canvas as PDF files except Okazaki Kyoko's *Rivers Edge* (1), which you are required to purchase in hard copy.**

1. OKAZAKI Kyoko. *River's Edge* (Vertical Comics/Kodansha, 2023)  
ISBN-10: 1647291836 ISBN-13: 978-1647291839

You are also encouraged to purchase your own copies of the below when feasible. They should be available from online retailers including Amazon, used and new.

2. KAWABATA Yasunari, *Snow Country* (Vintage, 1996)  
ISBN-10: 0679761047 ISBN-13: 978-0679761044  
Available also in e-book format.

3. OOKA Shōhei, *Fires on the Plain* (Tuttle, 2001)  
ISBN: ISBN-10: 0804813795 ISBN-13: 978-0804813792  
Available also in e-book format.

4. ABE Kobo, **The Woman in the Dunes** (Vintage, 1991)

ISBN-10: 0679733787 ISBN-13: 978-0679733782

Available also in e-book format.

5. YOSHIMOTO Banana. **Kitchen** (Grove Press, 1993)

ISBN-10: 0802142443 ISBN-13: 978-0802142443

Available also in e-book format.

6. NAKANO Hitori, **Train Man** (Del Rey Books, 2007)

ISBN: ISBN-10: 0345498690 ISBN-13: 978-0345498694

**NOT available in e-book, and please do not confuse this one with the manga versions.**

7. MURATA Sayaka. **Convenience Store Woman** (First Grove Atlantic, 2018)

ISBN-10: 0802129625 ISBN-13: 978-0802129628

Available also in e-book format.

### **Films**

**To view the films, please subscribe to the Criterion Channel for the semester. The cost is \$10.99/month, and there is a 14-day trial period.** The first two films of the semester (*Tokyo Story* and *Rashomon*) are also available for free elsewhere, so you could conceivably wait until mid-February to subscribe to Criterion. Even if you sign up at the beginning, the total cost for the semester should be less than \$50.

The rationale: All but a few of the assigned films are available on the Criterion Channel. As a subscriber you will also have access to numerous other important films by Japanese directors, as well as commentaries and documentaries. It is truly the best way to get the most out of this course (plus have an enormous supply of other great films to check out in your free time.)

You may want to make sure you can access the Criterion Channel (use the free trial) before deciding whether you wish to stay in the course.

If this presents insurmountable challenges, either financial or technical, please let me know asap, so we can try to figure out workaround solutions.

### **Requirements**

Attendance and participation in class (20%).

Posting weekly to Canvas, including responding to classmates (40%).

One short paper (4-5pages): prompt to be specified (20%).

One final take-home exam OR final paper OR final project. (20%)

### **In Case of Zoom Lecture**

This course is held in-person. However, if there is a need to host any class on Zoom, here is the policy. Any synchronous sessions will start on time. It would be a good idea to log on a few minutes early. You will enter the room **automatically muted**. Please remember to unmute when you speak. **You are requested to keep your camera on**, not for surveillance from me, but to help build and maintain a sense of connection among us.

### **What If? Policies**

What if I must miss class? If you must miss any class session, let me know, do the readings/viewings, make sure you post on the Discussion Board, and get notes from someone in the class about what you missed.

What if I feel sick? Follow the Student Health Service guidelines and protocols. Don't come to in-person class if you feel sick. Let me know that you will miss class. If you are able to do so, continue with the work online (reading, posting). See your doctor or otherwise get a diagnostic test from your provider as needed.

What if I have to miss more than one week of class? If you have to miss class for an extended period of time for health or personal reasons, it is especially important to communicate with me, so that we can figure out the best solution. Depending on the timing and length of your absences, we will consider different options including "Incompletes" or "Withdrawals." In many cases it will be possible to make up for missed sessions, but I need to stay informed, and discuss the various options with you.

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity can mean different things in different contexts. In our class, the following is the most important principle to remember: *Always do your own work, and always acknowledge which ideas and phrasings are borrowed from other places and cite these accurately.*

In this class, we will hold each other accountable to the following agreement: any work that is submitted by you for consideration must 1. be created by you (and no one or anything else) and/or 2. must appropriately acknowledge sources and inspiration.

### **Posting to the Discussion Board**

Every week, you are asked to upload a short post (recommended length 200-300 words) to the Discussion Board on Canvas. You will find a series of study/discussion questions there each week. You may respond to one of the prompts (do not try to respond to all of them!), or you can pose your own questions, comments, critiques.

**The weekly deadline for posting is Monday at 9 am EST. Of course, you may post earlier in the week.**

You are also asked to briefly respond to two posts by your classmates. The recommended timeframe for responses is between Tuesday and sometime on Wednesday, ideally before class.

Your posts will only be graded as complete/incomplete, but their overall quantity and quality will count as part of your course grade. For best results, post early, post thoughtfully, and respond to each other generously. And this should go without saying: do not 'borrow' other people's writing without proper attribution. But feel free to post links to relevant items online.

### **Formal Writing Assignments**

The short paper will be on a topic specified by the instructor. The grading will be based on 1) clarity and sophistication of the thesis, 2) richness and effectiveness of evidence, 3) persuasiveness and logic of organization, and 4) writing style. Detailed description and writing guide will be posted on Canvas.

### **Finals**

The default option is a **final research paper**. The other options are a **final take-home exam**, consisting of two or three essay questions, or a creative **final project** combined with a short analytical statement.

I encourage creative possibilities, including writing short stories and screenplays, translations (you must find your own document or story to translate), shooting a short film/video, creating animation, illustrations, manga adaptations, etc.

If you decide to pursue this **final project** option, you will need to let me know by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> week and submit a **proposal**. A **progress report** will be due at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> week. You will also be asked to submit a written statement explaining and analyzing the project.

**Extra Credit**

You can earn extra credit by attending lectures and special events that you consider relevant for the class topic and by writing brief reports on Canvas (200 words or longer). You can find more events on the Center for East Asian Studies website, and the Cinema Studies website.

There is also at least one extra credit opportunity built into the course in the form of a book or film recommendation. More information will be announced on canvas.

**Due Dates**

I realize life is complicated and so try to be flexible. A 24-hour extension is usually granted without question, as long as you let me know in advance.

**General Note about Content**

This course deals with artworks and issues that have been considered controversial, and/or disturbing. I have chosen these works because I believe them to be of high artistic and pedagogical merit, but your experience may vary.

If you suspect a specific material will be challenging to you, I am happy to discuss those concerns before they come up in class. Likewise, if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions with me individually rather than via Discussion Board, I welcome those conversations as part of our classwork. Let me know if you have any concerns or questions.

I also realize that this is a particularly challenging time for most of us, and that your emotional landscape might change during the semester. When the materials for a particular week become too much to process, take a break for a day. If the difficulty persists, let me know. In some weeks there may be alternative texts and films that will allow you to still learn and contribute to the class discussion.

## Course Plan

This is a provisional list of readings. **Substitutions and additions will be made in Canvas.**

### **Part I: Introduction, Fiction, Film**

#### **Week 1: Japan in Fiction and Film: A Preliminary Glimpse**

No class. Syllabus and Week 2 Instructions sent out asynchronously.

Begin Reading for Week 2 over the weekend.

#### **Week 2: 1/22 M and 1/24 W The 'Japanese Aesthetic' in Fiction**

**Kawabata** Yasunari, Snow Country (*Yukiguni* 1935-47), trans. Edward Seidensticker (1956; New York: Vintage, 1997).

**Recommended supplementary readings:** Edgar V. Roberts, excerpt from Writing Themes About Literature, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999: pp. 42-47.

Timothy J. Corrigan, "Beginning to Think, Preparing to Watch, and Starting to Write," in A Short Guide to Writing about Film (New York: Longman 2004): pp. 17-34. [Hereafter Corrigan]

In-class/Canvas viewing: parts of Snow Country (*Yukiguni*; 1957) directed by **Toyoda Shirô**. 124 min.

**Read for Monday: Kawabata Snow Country Part I, Roberts and Corrigan (recommended)**

**Read for Wednesday: Kawabata Part II**

**COURSE ADD PERIOD ENDS: Tuesday 1/27.**

#### **Week 3: 1/29 M and 1/31 W The 'Japanese Aesthetic' in Film**

**Ozu** Yasujiro with Noda Kogo, "Tokyo Story" (*Tôkyô monogatari*, 1953), trans. Donald Richie and Eric Klestadt, in Contemporary Literature: An Anthology of Fiction, Film, and Other Writing Since 1945, ed. Howard Hibbett (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), pp. 189-237.

Recommended supplementary reading: Joseph Murphy's website: "Japanese Film as a Critique of Western Realist Cinema"; check Canvas for link to website.

Viewing assignment: Tokyo Story (*Tokyô monogatari*; 1953) written and directed by **Ozu Yasujiro**. 135 min.

Read for Monday: Murphy, Ozu screenplay.

View for Wednesday: Tokyo Story.

**Week 4: 2/5 M and 2/7 W Moral Relativism in Prewar and Postwar Japan**

Setsuwa from Tales of Times Now Past: Sixty-Two Stories from a Medieval Japanese Collection, trans. Marion Ury (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979); Japanese Tales trans. Royall Tyler (New York: Pantheon, 1987).

**Akutagawa** Ryunosuke, "In a Grove" (藪の中 *Yabu no naka* 1922), "Rashomon" (羅生門 *Rashômon* 1915) in Rashomon and Other Stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, trans. Takashi Kojima (New York: Liveright, 1952): pp. 19-33, 34-44.

Recommended supplementary reading: Corrigan "Film Terms and Topics for Film Analysis and Writing," pp. 35-74.

Viewing assignment: [Rashomon](#) (*Rashômon*; 1950) directed by **Kurosawa Akira**. 88 min.

Read for Monday: three Setsuwa tales, two Akutagawa short stories.

View for Wednesday: [Rashomon](#)

**Part II: War, Memory, and Recovery****Week 5: 2/12 M and 2/14 W The Experience of Battle in Fiction and Film**

**Ooka** Shohei, *Fires on the Plain* (野火 *Nobi* 1952), trans. Ivan Morris (1957; Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 2001).

Viewing assignment: [Fires on the Plain](#) (*Nobi*; 1959) directed by Ichikawa Kon. 105 min.

**Week 6: 2/19 M and 2/21 W Women and Recovery in the Postwar**

**Hayashi** Fumiko, "A Late Chrysanthemum" (晩菊 *Bangiku* 1948), trans. Lane Dunlop, in A Late Chrysanthemum: Twenty-One Stories from the Japanese (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1986), pp. 95-112.

**Hayashi** Fumiko, "Narcissus" (水仙 *Suisen* 1949), trans. Kyoko Iriye Selden, in Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction, ed. Noriko Mizuta Lippit and Kyoko Iriye Selden (Armonk NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991), pp. 46-57.

Viewing assignment: [Late Chrysanthemums](#) (*Bangiku*; 1954) directed by **Naruse** Mikio. 101 min.

**Week 7: 2/26 M and 2/28 W Interlude**

In-class film viewing and short paper workshopping. No reading or viewing assignments.

**DROP PERIOD ENDS: Tuesday 2/27.**

**\*\*\* SHORT PAPER DUE: Friday 3/1 by 11:59pm.**

**No class 3/4 and 3/6: Enjoy Spring Break!**

**Part III: Post-defeat, Politics, Sexuality**



**Week 8: 3/11 M and 3/13 W Surrealism and Sexuality in 1950s/1960s**

Abe Kobo, The Woman in the Dunes (砂の女 *Suna no onna* 1962), trans. E. Dale Saunders (1964; New York: Vintage, 1991).

Viewing assignment: [Woman in the Dunes](#) (*Suna no onna*; 1964) directed by Teshigahara Hiroshi. 123 min.

**\*\*\* FINAL PROJECT/PAPER PROPOSALS DUE Friday 3/15 by 11:59pm.**

**Week 9: 3/18 M and 3/20 W Revolution and Fantasy in 1960s/1970s**

Terayama Shūji, The crimson thread of abandon : stories (赤糸で縫いとじられた物語 *akaito de nuitojirareta monogatari* 19) trans. Elizabeth L. Armstrong (MerwinAsia, 2014).

Viewing assignment: [Throw Away your Books, Riot in the Streets](#) (*Sho wo suteyo, machi he deyou*; 1971) directed by Terayama Shuji. 137 min.

**Week 10: 3/25 M and 3/27 W Sci-Fi Imaginings in 1970s/1980s**

Suzuki Izumi, Selections from Terminal Boredom: stories trans. Polly Barton, Sam Bett, David Boyd, Daniel Joseph, Aiko Masubuchi, and Helen O'Horan (New York and London: Verso, 2021)

Viewing assignment: [The Red Spectacles](#) (*Akai megane*; 1987) directed by Oshii Mamoru. 116 min.

**Part IV: Looking Back, Looking Forward****Week 11: 4/1 M and 4/3 W Home in The Bubble Years**

Yoshimoto Banana, Kitchen (キッチン *kicchin* 1988) trans. Megan Backus (New York: Grove Press, 1993).

Viewing assignment: [Family Game](#) (*Kazoku gēmu*; 1983) directed by Morita Yoshimitsu. 107 min.

**Week 12: 4/8 M and 4/10 W Youth in The Lost Decades**

Okazaki Kyoko, River's Edge (リバーズ・エッジ *Ribāzu Ejji* 1994) trans. Alexa Frank, Risa Cho, Pei Ann Yeap, Lorina Mapa, ed. Ajani Oloya (Tokyo: Vertical Comics/Kodansha, 2023)

Viewing assignment: [Blue Spring](#) (*Aoi haru* 2001) directed by Toyoda Toshiaki. 83 min.

**\*\*\* FINAL PAPER/PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT DUE Friday 4/12 by 11:59pm**

**Part V: Society, Self, Sensation****Week 13: 4/15 M and 4/17 W Relationships in the Mobile Age**

NAKANO Hitori, Train Man (Del Rey Books, 2007)

Viewing assignment: [Air Doll](#) (*Kūki Ningyō*; 2009) directed by **Kore'eda** Hirokazu. 125 mins.

**Week 14: 4/22 M and 4/24 W Place and Purpose Post-Fukushima**

**Murata** Sayaka. Convenience Store Woman (コンビニ人間 *konbini ningen* 2016) trans. Ginny Tapley Takemori (New York, NY: First Grove Atlantic, 2018)

Viewing assignment: TBA

**Week 15: 4/29 M and 5/1 W: Wrap-up Discussion and Presentations**

For students working on Final Projects and Final Papers, please be prepared to share a preview (one slide or snippet) of your work. More details will be announced.

For students taking the Final Exam option, the exam questions will be published after the last class.

**\*\*\* FINAL PAPERS, PROJECTS and EXAMS DUE: Friday 5/10 by 11:59pm.**