

# Japanese Film and Religions

RS 3E03 – Fall Term 2019/20

- Instructor: Dr. Mark Rowe
- Office: 126 University Hall
- Office Hours: TBA.
- Phone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23393 Email: rowemar[at]mcmaster.ca
- Lectures: Wed 6-9 pm. Location: TBD
  - Note – we use the tutorial time as class time. It is **mandatory** that you come for the whole 3 hours on Wednesdays.

## Description

This course explores contemporary Japanese religion and culture through the medium of film. The course will be divided into three thematic blocks: “Samurai”; “Families”; and “Grudges, Monsters, and Heroes.” We will consider a variety of issues, including the origins of samurai ideals and what they may tell us about Japanese families today, what the monstrous reveals about the everyday, and how gender norms are shifting in contemporary Japan. Students will not only gain broad knowledge of core aspects of Japanese religions and culture but will also be encouraged to think critically about cinematography and filmmaking. Each week we will watch and discuss a new film. Although some background knowledge of Japan and film is helpful, it is not required.

## Course Materials:

1. Textbook ([e-version available for free through library](#)): *Japanese Cinema* (2007) Phillips, Alastair and Stringer, Julian.
2. Additional readings provided by instructor. (In other words, you don't have to buy any texts for this course.)
3. Optional: Michiko Yusa 2002. *Japanese Religious Traditions* (JRT), Prentice Hall. I will put three copies of this on reserve. I strongly advise you to read over that book and create a timeline of Japanese periods/events/and figures so you have a sufficient overview of Japanese history to understand what's going on week to week. It is a short book, you can read the whole thing in an hour.

## Requirements

**There will be no final exam for this course. Instead, we will have:**

**Three in-class quizzes on lecture, reading, and film content – 45% (3 x 15)**

- Dates: September 25, October 30, and December 4. **IN CLASS.**
- These short quizzes will require students to identify characters, directors, themes, and arguments from the readings, lectures, and films. They will take place in class.

**Film Assignment – 20%**

- Due on November 6 . **DUE IN CLASS.**
- You must locate and watch 3 Japanese films – one film for each of our three course themes.
- You must also find at least two academic articles or book chapters on each film. More is better. Wikipedia is not acceptable. If you have a question about whether or not a text is acceptable, ask me.
- You must write 400-500 words on each film connecting it to the theme of the class and discussing any religious themes or undertones. Imagine you were asked to give a short lecture to the class on the film and write that.

**Final Paper – 35%**

- Due on December 4. **DUE IN CLASS.**
- Choose one of the three films you found in the previous assignment. Write a short paper on the film that includes a short summary and an extended critical reflection on the material. Critical reflection means thinking about the significance of the film and about what it might tell us about Japanese religions and culture more generally. In other words, critical reflection asks, and attempts to answer, the “so-what question.” Be sure to also think about cinematic techniques used in the film. Papers must be typed and double spaced. They should be between 1200 and 1500 words. Late submissions will be penalized one point per day (i.e. 1% of your total course grade)
- I will read drafts for those of you who send me an electronic copy (word doc.) by 6pm on November 20.
- I will provide more details on the assignments in coming weeks.

**Your Responsibilities:**

You are responsible for all material on this syllabus and for making up missed films, lectures, and assignments. Course content and scheduling may change, all notifications will be made on the course web page and, when possible, in lecture and tutorial. Students are responsible for regularly checking the course web page.

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary,

reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

**The course website can be found on Avenue to Learn.**

Note: Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

You are also responsible for bringing concerns about grading to the attention of your TA and myself in a timely manner. This means that if you have questions about your grade on a particular assignment or test, you must let us know within one week of the official posting of that grade. Your concerns must be specific. Please do not come to us with: “I think I deserve a better grade,” or “I worked really hard.” Please also be aware that if you ask me to double check your grade on an assignment, there is just as much chance that your grade will go down as up.

**Academic Dishonesty Statement:**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

**If you are ever in a situation where you are not sure if what you are submitting constitutes plagiarism, contact me immediately.**

## **McMaster Student Absence Form**

### ***Use of the MSAF***

The McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF) (<http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/>) is a self-reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report MEDICAL absences that last up to **THREE days** and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work (**that is less than 25% of the course grade**). Please note, this tool cannot be used during any final examination period. You may submit a maximum of ONE Academic Work Missed request per term. It is YOUR responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation. If you are absent for more than 5 days, exceed one request per term, are absent for a reason other than medical, or have missed work worth 30% or more of the final grade, you **MUST** visit your Faculty Office. You may be required to provide supporting documentation. This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence.

## **Social Sciences Faculty E-mail Communication Policy**

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a

McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Email

Forwarding in MUGSI:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/support/email/emailforward.html>

\*Forwarding will take effect 24-hours after students complete the process at the above link.

## **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca). For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

## Course Outline

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE – CHECK COURSE PAGE REGULARLY)

### UNIT ONE – Samurai Ideals and Realities

1. **September 4 – Rashomon (Rashomon 1950). Director: Kurosawa Akira**  
Readings (to be read before coming to class)
  - *Japanese Cinema* – Introduction
  - Linden – “5 views of Rashomon” (posted on Avenue)
2. **September 11 – Harakiri (Seppuku 1962). Director: Kobayashi Masaki**  
Readings (to be read before coming to class)
  - Hurst – “Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushidō Ideal” (posted on Avenue)
3. **September 18 - The Life of Oharu (Saikaku ichidai onna 1952). Director: Mizoguchi Kenji**  
Readings (to be read before coming to class)
  - *Japanese Cinema* – Chapter 6
4. **September 25 – Tampopo (Tampopo 1985). Director: Itami Juzo**  
Readings (to be read before coming to class)
  - *Japanese Cinema* – Chapter 20

### First Quiz

### UNIT TWO - Family

5. **October 2 - After Life (Wandafuru Raifu 1998) Director: Koreeda Hirokazu**  
Readings (to be read before coming to class)
  - *Japanese Cinema* – Chapter 21 (note that this chapter is not about the film we are watching)
6. **October 9 - Late Spring (Banshun 1949) Director: Ozu Yasujiro**  
Readings (to be read before coming to class)
  - *Japanese Cinema* – Chapters 1 and 5

### October 16 – Reading Week – No Class.

7. **October 23 - Wild Berries (Hebi Ichigo 2003) Director: Nishikawa Miwa 2003**  
Readings (to be read before coming to class)
  - TBA

**8. October 30 – The Family Game (Kazoku Gēmu 1983) Director: Morita Yoshimitsu**

- Readings (to be read before coming to class)
- *Japanese Cinema* - Chapter 18

**Second Quiz**

**UNIT THREE – Heroes and Villains**

**9. November 6 – The Ballad of Narayama (Narayama Bushikō 1983)**

**Director: Imamura Shohei**

- Readings (to be read before coming to class)
- *TBA*

**Film Assignment Due**

**10. November 13 – The Grudge (Ju-on 2002) Director: Shimizu Takashi**

Readings (to be read before coming to class)

- *Japanese Cinema* – Chapter 23 (note that this chapter is not about the film we are watching)

**11. November 20 – Train Man (Densha Otoko 2005) Director: Murakami Shosuke**

Readings (to be read before coming to class)

- Alexy “Labouring Heroes” (Posted on Avenue)

**November 27 – Class cancelled. I will be at the yearly conference for Religious Studies (AAR).**

**12. December 4 – Mystery Movie!!!**

**Final Quiz**

**Final Paper Due**