

## COMPARATIVE CULTURAL STUDIES

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### DESCRIPTION:

In the first part this course introduces some basic Japanese socio-cultural concepts such as *tatemae/hone*, *giri*, *wabi/sabi*, *ryosai kenbo*, and so forth in order to become familiar with some general constructs, influencing the inherent logic of Japanese society. In the second part, the course introduces Japanese society from a cultural-anthropological perspective with an attempt to present a variety of views on Japan. The emphasis is placed on multi-cultural facets rather than homogeneity of Japanese society. The following topics are covered: sources of Japanese tradition, house/family system, community and neighborhood, social status and stratification, gender, religion, education and career, life cycle and festivals, entertainment, etc.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

#### Over the course of the program, student will:

- Develop an understanding of some of the more important aspects of Japanese Society.
- Be able differentiate between the important social and cultural aspects of the country.
- Define the differences between Japanese and American/European/Asian (etc.) cultures.
- Recognize unique and borrowed social forms that are found in Japan.
- Appreciate Japanese artistic and cultural properties.
- Understand the nature and purpose of comparative cultural studies.

### STUDY MATERIALS:

**<Core Textbook> *TEXTBOOKS MAY BE FOUND IN THE LIBRARY, THOUGH STUDENTS MAY CERTAINLY PURCHASE THEIR OWN.***

- Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today (Available from the University Bookshop soon).
- Yoshio Sugimoto An Introduction to Japanese Society (Available from the library)

**Further readings (all the following may be found in the University library – the number is their stack reference code)**

- Sharon Kinsella. Adult manga : culture and power in contemporary Japanese society. 80003748
- Takeo Doi The anatomy of self : the individual versus society 9014755
- Hendry, Joy. Understanding Japanese Society. 91019739
- Davies, Roger., and Ikeno, Osamu. The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture. 10009969
- Benedict, Ruth. The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture. 9010146
- Denoon, Donald. Et al. Multicultural Japan.

**ASSESSMENT:** Student achievement of the stated course Objectives will be measured in terms of student performance in the following areas: (1) Essay (50%), (2) Seminar assignments (30%), and (3) Attendance/participation (20%).

The essay will be of around 2,000 words in length, submitted no later than the **end of week fifteen**. Any of the following essay questions may be used, though anyone wishing to research a different issue may come to see me before the end of week three to agree upon a question of their own choosing (a thing which I strongly endorse).

- 1: “Mass culture depends on its market”. Are Japan’s traditional cultural properties being slowly eroded by the sort of mass popularisation which has seen Kabuki in a Parisian Opera House and Bunraku in a London University?
- 2: Discuss the role of the Mother figure (working and otherwise) in the modern Japanese household. How has her position changed in the last twenty years.
- 3: “Why is Bushido still so important to the Japanese salaryman?” Discuss the ongoing importance of this seemingly feudal concept to Japanese society – especially within business, education and the political field.
- 4: “The countryside is emptying and no-one knows how to stem the tide”. Discuss the current perception of a rapid population decline in areas like Akita Prefecture. Are these fears justified and, if so, what causes/consequences can you identify in this population shift?
- 5: “Believe in a sign of Zeta!” Anime, manga and a host of other Japanese pop-culture icons have exploded onto the world in the last decade or so (Indeed, often the only interlocutor to Japanese culture for some people). What is it about these – often archly Japanese – cultural properties which makes them so accessible and, indeed, are they actually a good example of what Japan has become?

**POLICIES:** All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for this course. Acts of plagiarism or other forms academic dishonesty will be dealt with harshly. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plagiarism> for more information. To this end, an electronic copy of the essay will also be collected to check using plagiarism software.

**COURSE FORMAT AND ACTIVITIES:** Weekly sessions will be divided into lecture and group seminar sessions. During lectures the key points of the course will be presented, exercises carried out and group assignments for the seminars will be issued.

The Seminar will always take place on the first session of the week, to give you ample time to prepare after the previous lecture. As a consequence, the first session is likely to be a shortish one – as there will be relatively little to actually discuss.

**SCHEDULE: Slightly modified from that posted to the WEB.**

<Week 1>

**Theme:** *Uchi and Soto: Mythconceptions of Japan.*

**Lecture:** Introducing the subject of Japanese Cultural Studies from a comparative point of view and introducing the first important issue of note (*nihonjinron*) to the class.

**Seminar Question:** What do current views on the notion of *nihonjinron* scholarship say about modern Japanese attitudes to both themselves and others.?

**Readings:**

- Donald Keene. Appreciations of Culture. Kodansha. (Available from the University Bookshop).
- Takeo Doi The anatomy of self : the individual versus society 9014755
- Hendry, Joy. Understanding Japanese Society. 91019739
- Reischauer, Edwin. The Japanese Today: Change and Continuity. 91016870

<Week 2>

**Theme:** *Studying Japan.*

**Lecture:** Examining foreign perspectives on Japan in both the historical context and in the modern age – both in positive and negative ways.

**Seminar Question:** What does European and American views on Japan during and after the Second World War say about the social and political insecurities in the West?

**Readings:**

- Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today.
- Benedict, Ruth. The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture. 9010146
- Denoon, Donald. Et al. Multicultural Japan.

<Week 3>

**Theme:** *Screening One: "Ikiru" [To Live].*

**Lecture:** One of the most heart rending Japanese films ever made which examines the nature of what it was to be Japanese in the post-war period..

**Seminar Question:** "Review 'Ikiru' with an eye to the issue of loyalty and service – what has Japan become for the main characters in the post-war years?"

**Readings:** NA.

<Week 4>

**Theme:** *Class and Stratification.*

**Lecture:** Exploding the myth that Japan has no clear cut class divisions, but is rather defined by a of a group-against-group mentality (drawn from certain readings of *tatemae* perhaps). This week's lecture details different perspectives on the social structure of contemporary Japan.

**Seminar Question:** How do the Japanese themselves conceptualise the notion of class division?

**Readings:**

Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today

Yoshio Sugimoto An Introduction to Japanese Society

<Week 5>

**Theme:** *Work and Labour.*

**Lecture:** This week's lecture looks at popular *soto* mythconceptions of Japanese *zaibatsu*-esque corporations dominating work and consumer life and exposes a more complex picture of small company involvement.

**Seminar Question:** the so called '*New Freeta*' were once seen as the enemy of the Japanese work ethic. How and why have companies – both large and small – taken this expanding group to heart in the last 5 years?

**Readings:**

- Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today (Available form the University Bookshop soon).
- Hendry, Joy. Understanding Japanese Society. 91019739
- Denoon, Donald. Et al. Multicultural Japan.

<Week 6>

**Theme:** *Screening Three: "Tampopo" [Dandelion].*

**Lecture:** Juzo Itami's masterful parable of food, sex and friendship.

**Seminar Question:** "Review 'Tampopo' with an eye to the issue of family relations and the position of women in Japanese society, then (mid 1980s) and now."

**Readings:** NA.

<Week 7>

**Theme:** *Discovery of the Self.*

**Lecture:** This week we are going to go over some of the key moments in Japanese history and consider how these have affected social cohesion, religious matters and – ultimately – cultural development.

**Seminar Question:** “The Japanese have no sense of self. They steal everything they can, and destroy that which they cannot steal” – Gen. Douglas McArthur. Discuss?

**Readings:**

- Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today.
- Benedict, Ruth. The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture. 9010146
- Denoon, Donald. Et al. Multicultural Japan.

<Week 8>

**Theme:** *Family Breakdowns.*

**Lecture:** Seen as the heart of all Japanese social order, the family unit is the subject of this week’s lecture. Specifically we will be dealing with issues of (non)marriage and reproduction, as well as the aging state of the families.

**Seminar Question:** “A patriarchy which would collapse without female support’. Examine the role of women in a modern Japanese working family.

**Readings:**

- Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today (Available from the University Bookshop soon).
- Yoshio Sugimoto An Introduction to Japanese Society (Available from the library)
- Hendry, Joy. Understanding Japanese Society. 91019739
- Davies, Roger., and Ikeno, Osamu. The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture. 10009969

<Week 9>

**Theme:** *Screening Three: “Redbeard”.*

**Lecture:** Akira Kurosawa’s “Redbeard” concerns the relationship between a village doctor and his new trainee. It examines the problem of social injustice and explores two of Kurosawa's favourite topics: existential humanism and existentialism.

**Seminar Question:** “Review ‘Redbeard’ with an eye to the issue of cultural tensions and the search for identity in a strained period of Japanese history”

**Readings:** NA.

<Week 10>

**Theme:** *Minorities and Immigrants.*

**Lecture:** This week's lecture deals with the Japanese view of both native ethnic groups and immigrant communities. It will detail both the negative and positive ways in which such groups are negotiated with by the, so called, ethnic Japanese and look at the, often artificial, nature of the divisions thrown up against such people by those who seek to preserve something of Japan's own imaginary pristine national identity.

**Seminar Question:** Why are so many Japanese afraid of being associated with a *soto* heritage in the modern world? .

**Readings:**

- Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today (Available from the University Bookshop soon).
- Takeo Doi The anatomy of self : the individual versus society 9014755
- Hendry, Joy. Understanding Japanese Society. 91019739

<Week 11>

**Theme:** *Insider Dealing.*

**Lecture:** It is often said that most serious crime in Japan is to be found in the government. This lecture explores this myth and examines the grains of truth which gave light to it – examining the structure of the post-war government and the moneyed interests which still essentially control Japanese politics (much as anywhere else in the world).

**Seminar Question:** Why did the LDP, which had successfully controlled Japanese politics for over thirty years, fail so dramatically in 1993?

**Readings:**

- Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today (Available from the University Bookshop soon).
- Yoshio Sugimoto An Introduction to Japanese Society (Available from the library)
- Hendry, Joy. Understanding Japanese Society. 91019739
- Davies, Roger., and Ikeno, Osamu. The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture.

<Week 12>

**Theme:** *Screening Four: "A Taxing Woman" or "Minbo no Onna".*

**Lecture:** Juzo Itami's examines the issue of the Yakuza and the seamier side of Japanese business.

**Seminar Question:** "Review the film with an eye to the issue of institutional corruption and the part which it still seems to play in Japanese business/politics."

**Readings:** NA.

<Week 13>

**Theme:** *Classic Culture: Theatre and Painted Ladies.*

**Lecture:** This week's lecture examines the more traditional arts which have come back into their own in Japan of late.

**Seminar Question:** Why is *kabuki* still so immensely popular in Japan?

**Readings:**

- Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today (Available from the University Bookshop soon).

<Week 14>

**Theme:** *Super Dollfies vs. Bunraku: Popular and Elite Culture Clashes.*

**Lecture:** Examining the nature of Japanese popular and youth movements in the modern age – from Gothic Lolita/Nazism fetishes, through the Americana movements to the Super Dollfie passions – and the ways in which they conflict with more traditional pastimes.

**Seminar Question:** Inclusive or exclusive: Are Japanese popular cult movements concerned with creating groups, or excluding individuals?

**Readings:**

- Edwin Reischauer. The Japanese Today (Available from the University Bookshop soon).
- Sharon Kinsella. Adult manga : culture and power in contemporary Japanese society.  
80003748

<Week 15>

**Theme:** *Screening Five: "Cagliostro's Castle".*

**Lecture:** Hayao Miyazaki's entrée into the Lupin III franchise, which gave us one of the finest films every made.

**Seminar Question:** No Homework.

**Readings:** NA.