

HIST 396 SAMURAI IN FILM.

Dr. Andrew GOBLE
361 McKenzie; 346-4800
platypus@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: M 0900–1030.

Department of History
University of Oregon
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240A McKenzie; CRN 36999

GTF Ms. Breann Goosmann
340B McKenzie
breann@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: W1000–1200

GTF Ms. Hillary Maxson
340L McKenzie
hmaxson@uoregon.edu
Office Hours, F 1300–1500

General

Japan's *samurai* warriors were one of the distinct elements of pre-20th Japanese society, culture, and government. Since then, the samurai have been variously appropriated in a number of contexts: anime samurai from outer space; samurai businessman; “Last Samurai;” samurai spirit that infuses the martial arts; practitioners of 20th century *bushidō* (*banzai* charges, self-immolation, death before defeat in the Pacific War); and exponents of *hara-kiri* (*hari-kari* in some English use).

Historically, these shorthand references mask a more nuanced and historically evolving social entity. While a specific warrior class existed for nearly 1000 years (900s to late 1800s), for the bulk of this time Japan was at peace, and warriors only rarely died while fighting. There was also a shift in the political position of the warrior class: prominent in rural areas in the 900s, to monopolizing national government from the 1600s. Warriors performed a number of roles over time: rural land-managers and administrators, members of warrior governments from the 1180s, major cultural patrons from the 1250s, bureaucrats from the 1600s. The social composition also changed: from hereditary families through the 1400s, to being drawn from any social background by the late 1500s, and back to hereditary families after 1600.

This class will focus on the samurai in the medieval era, roughly 1150s-1600, that period of time when they were most involved in warfare.

Samurai as they are recalled in film reflect not just the “historical samurai.” The choice of samurai type in films has also been influenced by concerns, social criticisms, valorizations, and the formation of historical memory. That is, when we see samurai, we sometimes see something of the shifting cultural and political currents of modern Japan (as well as entertainment!). Thus, the course will present different opportunities for learning about the samurai.

Course Structure.

The course is a combined lecture, film, and reading course. Films are generally preceded by a lecture. In addition some film synopses will be provided (on Blackboard) to outline main themes and to provide additional historical context.

Expected workload.

In order to satisfactorily complete the course, in addition to attendance at class, students will need to allocate at least ten hours per week for completing reading assignments and to reviewing films that have been shown in class. Also, in my own experience, preparing a good film report can entail viewing a film at least three times, in order to clarify details.

Evaluation.

1/ Attendance is required (10% of course grade).

2/ **All written work to be submitted is to be double spaced, 12-point, Melior or Times New Roman font, and printed on only one side of the page.**

3/ A mid-term **4/29** (25% of course grade). Study guide provided.

4/ A 1300-word exploration of Conlan's *State of War* (20% of course grade). Due no later than **5/06**.

5/ A film report on one of the films, 4-5 pages (worth 15% course grade). The report is due no later than **5/24**. The film report is to focus on themes, and is **not** a film review.

6/ A final exam on **6/10** (1900, regular classroom, 30% of course grade). It will be based on course material covered since the mid-term. Study guide provided.

7/ **Failure to pass the final exam is an automatic fail for the entire course.**

Assigned Texts. Thomas Conlan, *State of War*.

Additional Readings. All potentially examinable. They are available on Blackboard.

ANTICIPATED LECTURE, FILM AND READING SCHEDULE.

- WEEK I 4/01.** Introduction
General Overview of Japanese History, 1150s-1630s.
Mimi nashi Hōichi no hanashi 耳無し芳一の話 (**Hōichi the Earless**) [in, *Kwaidan* 怪談 (**Ghost Stories**) (DVD 01058; 60 mins.).
Reading: Conlan, *State of War*, chapter 6.
- WEEK II 4/08.** Lecture: Rise of the Warrior Class, 1150s-1190s.
Jigokumon 地獄門 (**Gate of Hell**). (VT 06342; VT 00437; 86 mins).
Reading: Jeffrey Mass, “The Kamakura Bakufu.”
- WEEK III 4/15.** Lecture: Warriors and Leadership – Hōjō Shigetoki.
Lecture: Warriors and Fighting – *The Scroll of the Mongol Invasions*.
Lecture: Fourteenth Century: Rupture and Warfare.
Reading: Conlan, *State of War*, chapters 1 and 3.
C. Steenstrup, “The Gokurakuji Letter: Hōjō Shigetoki’s Compendium of Political and Religious Ideas of Thirteenth Century Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, 32.1 (Spring 1977), pp. 1-34.
- WEEK IV 4/22.** Guest Lecture, Ms. Bree Goosmann: War, Society, and Women.
Onibaba 鬼婆 (**The Ogress**). (VT 05493; 104 mins).
Reading: Conlan, *State of War*, chapters 1, 3, 6.
Goble. “War and Injury.” *Monumenta Nipponica*, 60.3 (Autumn 2005), 297-338.
- WEEK V 4/29.** Lecture: Warrior Loyalty and Ethics
Kakushi toride no san akunin (隠し砦の三悪人) (DVD 01011; 139 mins).
Reading: Conlan, *State of War*, chapters 5, 7, and 8.
C. Steenstrup, “The Imagawa Letter: A Muromachi Warrior’s Code of Conduct Which Became a Tokugawa Schoolbook,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, 28.3 (Autumn 1973), 295-316.

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- WEEK VI 5/06. MID-TERM EXAM**
Lecture: Village Defense Against Samurai.
Shichinin no samurai 七人の侍 (**The Seven Samurai**) (DVD 03041) (203 mins).
Reading: Nagahara, "The Medieval Peasant."
Conlan, *State of War*, chapter 4.
- WEEK VII 5/13 Review of Conlan due.**
continuing *Shichinin no samurai* (**The Seven Samurai**).
Reading: Nagahara, "The Medieval Peasant."
Conlan, *State of War*, chapter 4.
- WEEK VIII 5/20.** Lecture: Organization and Warlords: the Takeda.
Ten to chi to 天と地と (**Heaven and Earth**). (VT 06718, 104 mins).
Reading: Conlan, *State of War*, chapters 7 and 8.
C. Steenstrup, "Hōjō Sōun's Twenty-One Articles: The Code of Conduct of the Odawara Hōjō," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 29.3 (Autumn 1974), 283-303.
- 5/24 Film report due.** Last date by which film report can be handed in (unless doing *Ten to chi to*, preferably has been handed in by 5/20).
- WEEK IX 5/27.** Memorial Day, no class.
- WEEK X 6/03.** Lecture: The End of War: Reshaping the Samurai.
Harakiri 切腹 (**Ritual Suicide**). [VT 06739; 134 mins)
Reading: M.E. Berry. "Public Peace and Private Attachment."
Conlan, *State of War*, chapter 8.
- 6/10 FINAL EXAM:** 1900, regular classroom (240A McKenzie).

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GUIDE FOR FILM REPORT AND BOOK EXPLORATION

Film Reports.

There are several ways in which you can craft a film report. In this course, the emphasis is on your writing a report that demonstrates clear familiarity with the film; and that you have reflected on some of the themes or issues relating to samurai and warfare. Please remember that the class is not one on film or film history; and that the film report is **NOT** a film review that deals with directors, cinema technique, and suchlike. If it reads like a film review rather than something written for this course, then you may easily achieve an “F” grade.

The report could emphasize a particular theme that comes through in the film, or even a couple of themes. You could also reflect upon the film and discuss issues that occurred to you. We will address some possibilities in class.

The **least desirable** film report, which being such is not to be submitted (and if so might well earn a grade of “F”) is one that provides a synopsis of the film – after all, we’ve all seen it.

Feel free to inform your report with ideas and general information that you may have encountered in the readings, although this is not required in order to write a successful report.

Book exploration of Thomas Conlan, *State of War*.

This book exploration will be a different effort than a film report.

It is **acceptable** to provide a general overview of the book, one that is thoughtful and not simply a recapitulation of the chapters. However, the best approach is to focus your efforts on a couple of themes in which you might have a particular interest, such as: loyalty and the warrior ethos, social organization of warrior society, weapons and tactics, warfare and violence.

It must be evident from the report that you have engaged a substantial amount of the book, and not just a few pages.

We will also address the book exploration in class.